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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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The END of EQUALITY

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by Mickey Kaus

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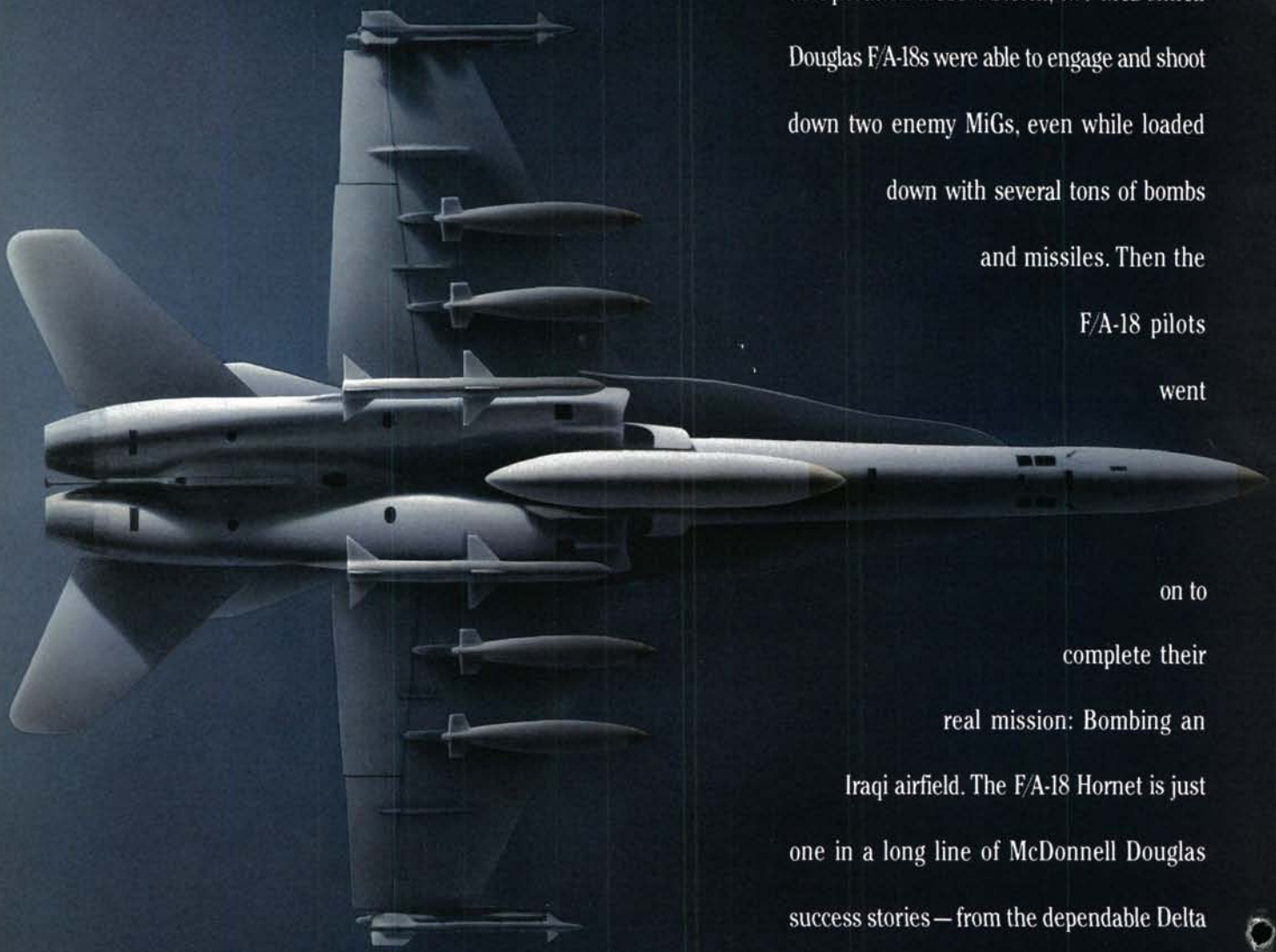

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JUNE 22, 1992

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CORRESPONDENCE

The riots

To the editors:

TNR's solutions to the underclass problem are somewhat one-sided. TRB makes a case for enterprise zones being illusory, but your proposal, that "to break through this culture of idleness, poverty, illegitimacy ... we propose replacing all financial payments to the able-bodied poor ... with a simple offer of a government provided job" ("Race Against Time," May 25), is no panacea.

Simply calling all the problems of such a program "an administrative headache" is pretty specious. The headache could cripple the program's effectiveness altogether. How, for example, will the program define able-bodied? There are people who don't know how to work. Will they just get a paycheck for being assigned to a pretend-to-work project, like so many in the programs in the '30s? Such jobs are worse than welfare payments and hardly a morale booster for others in the program.

A deeper problem is that too many of the people involved would model their work ethic after the idle middle class; and there are lot of these in our bureaucracies, both private and public. One way to get rid of this ethic is to put the idle middle class to work with jobs of actual consequence: infrastructure rebuilding, for example. But will the skills of the idle match the skills required? Three hundred thousand jobs can't be filled overnight. Nor can they be filled without taking the time to inventory the real jobs that need to be filled. The paradoxes of this sort of program I know only too well. I was employed by the National Youth Administration Program in the '30s. Since there was not even enough make-work to go around, people who made the dean's list like me got paid for submitting a time card. And the hourly rate was higher than I could get at a real job. I was not much of a worker for years after that experience.

HARRY TANNENBAUM
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

To the editors:

Many of the suggestions you make in "Race Against Time" are fully supported by Congress and are contained in the conference report of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1991. Unfortunately, this bill has been the subject of a presidentially backed Republican filibuster in the Senate, making enactment of these essential reforms highly problematic.

As your piece suggests, one of the most critical needs of the criminal justice system is for mandatory drug treatment in the prisons. The link between drug abuse and crime is well established, as is the fact that a certain group of recidivist offenders commit a disproportionately large number of offenses. Studies clearly show that prisoners who are required to undergo drug treatment in prison have far lower recidivism rates that those who are not provided treatment. We must require these prisoners to undergo treatment so we can break the cycle of drugs and crime. The future of the crime bill, however, is very much in doubt because of the President's preference to play politics with the issue of crime. It has been six months since the House passed the conference report and the Republican filibuster in the Senate began.

CHARLES E. SCHUMER
Washington, D.C.

The writer is a U.S. representative from New York and chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice.

To the editors:

In his article "Following Orders" (May 25), on the trial of the police officers accused in the beating of Rodney King, Barry Scheck, like every media representative to whom I have been exposed, repeats the same canard, that the accused were charged with using excessive force. In fact, as Scheck may know or could easily have discovered, the police officers were charged with "Assault with a deadly weapon with intent to do grave bodily harm." Quite a difference between unnecessarily roughing someone up and attempted homicide.

Seen in this light, the verdict of the jury becomes, if not more acceptable, at least more understandable. Under the circumstances, would even an all-black jury have convicted the accused of attempted homicide?

ALBERT ARSENAULT
Tucson, Arizona

To the editors:

In "Twilight Zones" (TRB, May 25). Michael Kinsley adroitly borrows free market analysis to expose Jack Kemp's enterprise zone proposal as a disruptive, interventionist "private-public partnership." What bothers me is that when Kinsley hints at or asserts his own urban policy preferences, the logic does not lead to purer free market economics, but to a thick mist of left-wing dogma buffeted by precariously structured rhetoric. Reading his statement,

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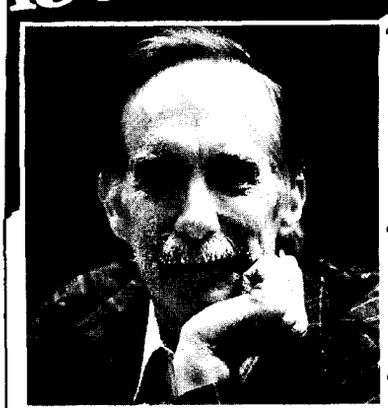

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"Bribing rich people to help poor people, rather than helping poor people directly, is a popular approach in this country . . ." was like hitting a brick wall head-on during a refreshing drive on an open road. In this instance, I translate "bribe" to mean "a reward or inducement to perform an act voluntarily." I translate "helping poor people directly" to mean "allowing agents of government to confiscate and redirect the product of individuals who have made good decisions and fruitful efforts." Is he implying that the consent of the benefactor is an expensive, cumbersome, and unnecessary step along the path to curing social ills? Or that coercing one segment to assist the blighted areas while hiring legions of another segment to administer the plunder is more practical than rewarding the benefactors to assist directly?

His capstone is the statement, "The way to create jobs is to create jobs," where he lauds Mickey Kaus's FDR-style proposal to "provide useful work for all who need it." Please, Mr. Kinsley. If you wish to set ideological "theology" aside, leave it aside throughout. Free market analysis is not a toy. When used honestly and consistently it is a sharp, two-edged sword. Be prepared to use both edges or put it away in a safe place.

MARK MORGAN
Atlanta, Georgia

To the editors:

I was concerned that your editorial on the urban crisis, otherwise well thought-out, did not mention the need for quality education and the part that the schools can play in bringing a more civilized culture to an otherwise deprived population. For the government to be the employer of last resort is indeed worthy of being considered, but an undereducated (and in many cases uneducated) individual is neither intellectually nor psychologically suited to perform any function, no matter how menial or rewarding it may be.

The cost for such a program initially would be considerable, but probably not as great as the cost of the S&L bailout. Eventually the cost would be paid by a reduction in the need for the extensive criminal justice system, the shorter welfare rolls, the added taxes provided by capable workers, and—unmeasured, but greater than all of these put together—the added contribution of productive individuals to American society.

KENNETH L. CANTWELL
Yorba Linda, California

To the editors:

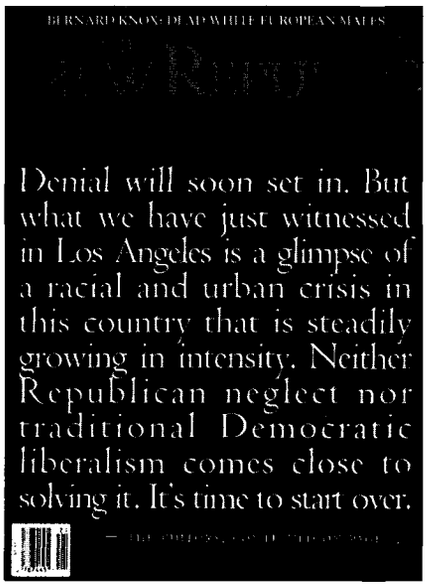
I am frustrated by the negligent hyperbole of Harold Meyerson's characterization of the Los Angeles riot as "the largest civic disorder in American history" ("Fractured City," May 25). Even if we limit ourselves to urban riots, overlooking events such as that civic disorder known as the Civil War, the Los Angles riot was far exceeded in violence and casualties by the New York City draft riot of July 13-15, 1863, which was ended not by a military show of force, but by actual combat between the Union Army and the rioters.

JOHN P. RATNASWAMY
Chicago, Illinois

Incorrect

To the editors:

Like your estimable film reviewer Stanley Kauffmann, I too am a spouting,


BERNARD KNOX: DEAD WHITE EUROPEAN MALES
Denial will soon set in. But what we have just witnessed in Los Angeles is a glimpse of a racial and urban crisis in this country that is steadily growing in intensity. Neither Republican neglect nor traditional Democratic liberalism comes close to solving it. It's time to start over.

gushing artery of infatuated praise when it comes to Emma Thompson. Like him, I was led by a fellow Thompson devotee to *The Tall Guy* (reviewed April 27). My guide dismissed the movie as slight and silly (it is), but with the salacious codicil that its most salient point was Thompson's exposure of more than her considerable acting talents.

Old Stanley must have been cowed by all those new feminists running through the pages of TNR from telling the naked truth.

CHRISTOPHER WALL
Denver, Colorado

Schizo

To the editors:

Reading "Excuuuse Me" (May 11), in which David Segal argues for ethnically insensitive humor, I was reminded of a TNR article from the late '70s arguing that humor had become too mean-spirited. (I think the article was called "Screw-you Humor"; the author was—I think—Arthur Lubow.) If I may generalize: this pair of articles is a perfect example of TNR's schizophrenia. You intone all sorts of liberal pieties; then when these pieties actually come to govern public policy or cultural discourse you express disapproval. Is this fair?

VICTOR SAMUELS
New York, New York

To the editors:

I generally enjoyed David Segal's piece on comedy's place in society, but I do have two important points of clarification. The "In Living Color" feature he refers to is not "Men on Films" plural. It is "Men on Film" singular. Furthermore, any authentic devotee of the show—there are millions of us—knows that Damon Wayans portrays Blaine Edwards and David Alan Grier plays Antoine Merriweather. I know we "all look alike" to some folks, but let's try to keep our black comedians straight.

SHEILA T. T. LYNCH
Oakland, New Jersey

Class wars

To the editors:

Your attack on Jane Tompkins's course at Duke University (Notebook, May 25) shows how limited the debate over p.c. has become. You title her course description "Beyond Reading," as if the class were so plainly ridiculous that it needed no further explanation. Your table of contents even refers to "an easy A at Duke," though you have no evidence of this.

TNR's resentment is peculiar, since the class shows no signs of the dreaded p.c. police you fear are everywhere. Tompkins is not reading jargon-filled criticism. She is not excluding DWEMS from her reading list. She is allowing students to write a traditional essay if they wish. But Tompkins is conducting an experiment. She is trying to make literature more meaningful in students' lives. Perhaps the experiment will fail. Perhaps the course will be an easy A or, even worse, will not educate students. But perhaps it can show students that books have meaning outside of the classroom, that books can affect the way we live. If this is all that TNR can find to ridicule in our universities, then the "multiculturalism" scare promoted in your magazine is nothing to worry about.

JOHN K. WILSON
Chicago, Illinois

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

Big tent blues

The 1988 Republican platform position on abortion is even more extreme than it first appears. That's because it is partly written in code, comprehensible only by those it is crafted to pander to.

The GOP does not merely pronounce that "the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life *which cannot be infringed*," seeming to allow no exceptions, even for rape and incest. It does not merely endorse "a human life amendment to the Constitution," which (just like the despised *Roe* v. *Wade*) would deny state legislatures the right to decide the abortion issue for themselves. The Republicans also declare, "We endorse legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to the unborn." What does that mean?

The Fourteenth Amendment provides that no person shall be denied "the equal protection of the laws." The Republican Party professes to believe that the fetus is a person under the Fourteenth Amendment and that laws should be passed to "make that clear." If the fetus is entitled to "equal protection of the laws," not only is abortion forbidden, just like the killing of any other human being, but any state that has the death penalty for killing an adult would have to apply the death penalty for killing an "unborn child." And if hiring a killer is treated as murder (which it is), a woman hiring an abortionist would have to be treated the same way.

Now, in reality that is a position held by no one except perhaps a few zealots. It is not the public position of President Bush, who claims to believe that women who have abortions should not be punished and says he favors the standard exceptions for rape, incest, and life-of-the-mother. Yet a Bush campaign spokesman says, "The president is comfortable with the 1988 platform language on abortion," and would like to see it repeated in 1992.

Who knows George Bush's real beliefs about abortion, if any. But, having famously flipped once, he dare not seem to flop. He must make up in stiff posture what he lacks in true conviction. Thus he and his party find themselves trapped in an extreme position they cannot possibly believe. Whatever word you might choose to characterize the Republican position on abortion, "comfortable" is not it.

It is delightful to watch the agony of the Republicans as they try to extract themselves from the Faustian bargain they made when abortion rights seemed protected by the Supreme Court and all the political energy was on the right-to-life side of the debate. "We are a party of diversity, of openness . . . ," sputters party chairman Rich Bond. "There has not been and will not be a litmus test on this issue." The late Lee Atwater, Bush's first party chairman, said the GOP should be a "big tent," capable of accommodating differing views. A group called "Republicans for Choice" would like the big-tent, no-litmus-test rhetoric inscribed in the platform, along with the official anti-abortion position.

But the two don't mix. Phyllis Schlafly, who leads the opposition to any platform change, has a point. How can you say, in effect, that abortion is baby killing but it's no big deal? What kind of party takes a do-or-die stand on a capital gains tax cut but not on the murder of innocent fetuses? What about doctors who practice abortion? Are they welcome inside the big tent, too?

Schlafly also has a point in asserting that Ann Stone, the founder of Republicans for Choice, is motivated at least in part by the money her company is making in the direct-mail campaign. Stone is the ex-wife of Roger Stone, who was Atwater's partner in a wildly successful political-consulting-and-influence-peddling conglomerate. They are all part of a culture of amoral, success-at-all-costs political operatives whose motto might well be another famous Atwaterism: "Bull permeates everything." The philosophy of the "big tent" and the philosophy of "bull permeates everything" are more or less the same.

Republicans for choice are kidding themselves. So, in my view, are black Republicans and gay Republicans and other traditional outsiders who think the party's tent should be big enough to include them.

Yes, you can believe in abortion rights and also believe in the Strategic Defense Initiative. Your sexual orientation shouldn't dictate your stand on government subsidies to public television. The color of your skin need not color your views on health care reform. No person can be expected to agree with any political party about everything, and America's two big parties are by tradition more centrist and accommodating than the more ideological parties of other democracies. That tradition has served America well, providing great political stability. But there are limits.

Some issues go together. You cannot reasonably expect the Republican Party to become more sympathetic to an expansive view of women's rights but not gay rights, or vice versa. As most American Jews have concluded, which is why they vote Democratic although socioeconomically they are more like Republicans, a spirit of toleration and diversity is indivisible. The Democratic Party may not stand for much, but surely it has the better claim to be a genuinely welcoming "big tent."

To be sure, there is a respectable tradition of libertarian conservatism, which could happily accommodate a notion like gay rights. And there used to be a tradition of progressive ("Rockefeller") Republicanism that didn't belittle government activism on behalf of blacks and would find women's issues like day care and parental leave easy to swallow. President Bush is at his most seemingly genuine—"comfortable"—when he is acting in this latter tradition, which is seldom. But the Republican Party of recent years has done more than just leave these traditions behind. It has kicked them in the teeth.

Of course the party's conversion is, for many of its leaders, insincere. Bush's 1980 realignment on abortion perfectly symbolizes that insincerity, but it is only one example. For another, I'll bet there isn't a single top official of the Bush administration who actually believes in the ban on gays in the military—a ban the administration publicly defends and refuses to lift.

But the insincerity is what makes the invitation into a "big tent" especially treacherous. With principled opponents, you can maybe do business. Those who may secretly sympathize with you but have already demonstrated their lack of backbone will obviously betray you again in a moment.

Come into our big tent, said the spider to the fly.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 22, 1992

THE GOOD WAR

The present cartography of the Middle East owes its origins to the League of Nations and to the warrant the League gave the victorious powers of World War I to contrive new states out of the huge, inchoate (but collapsed) Ottoman Empire. The first partition of Palestine in 1922 would be followed by another partition in 1947, but the quarter of 1 percent of Ottoman lands vouchsafed to the Jews would yet be too much for the Arabs. On the morrow of Israel's founding in 1948 a war was waged against the new state, and lost; and the land that the U.N. had envisaged for yet one more Arab state, this to be in western Palestine, was occupied by Jordan and Egypt. Then, in 1967, the Arab states started another war, the Six-Day War, more traumatic in outcome than even the first. After dazzling defensive maneuvers Israel occupied the land from which Egypt, Syria, and Jordan had launched their coordinated acts of aggression. And, true to form, the big powers soon began counseling concessions Israel might make to conciliate its irreconcilable enemies, concessions that would restore the perils under which it had lived for twenty years.

George Bush himself has a hankering for this status quo ante, and is infuriated that Israel won't follow his nostalgic lead. He is not alone in this impatience. Memory plays tricks on history, and doubtless there are millions who believe the Israeli occupation of the disputed territories is a cause of the Jewish-Arab conflict rather than one of its consequences.

It is now a quarter century since Gamal Abdel Nasser, incited by the Soviet Union, whipped up a hysteria that enticed the other Arabs into what they had been persuaded would be the final reckoning with the Jews. As Fouad Ajami has reminded us, the then head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Ahmad Shuqairi, assured the world that Israelis "born elsewhere would be repatriated to their countries of origin." The rest could remain in Palestine but, as Shuqairi put it, "I estimate none of them will survive." Now such rhetoric seems the stuff of phantasm, but Israelis cannot overlook—and we shouldn't either—the grisly routines of carnage and plunder that still obtain in the Arab world, most assuredly in its two strongest states, Syria and Iraq, and also in the state-presumptive of Palestine. Of the latter there is ample evidence, first in the brutal but widely ignored behavior of the PLO when it lorded over southern Lebanon from 1976 to 1982, and, more recently, in the nearly 600 assassinations carried out with pickax and butcher knife against other Palestinians by "the children of stones," so-called, gangsters with an armed doctrine.

Twenty-five years ago, this magazine editorialized: "To appreciate the shattering significance of Israel's victory, one must try to imagine the world as it would have been had Israel lost on the battlefield or remained passive only to expire later from slow strangulation." Radical Arab states would have won the upper hand against the petroleum dynasts, and the Soviets would have held the Arab card in world politics. We did not grasp this in 1967, so we watched the agony of the Jews from afar. The fact is that Israel fought with its back to the sea, and it fought against an attempted genocide. It also learned lessons about whom it should not trust. When Nasser demanded that the U.N. secretary-general withdraw international forces from the Egyptian-Israeli border, a cowed U Thant capitulated, and within days there were 80,000 Egyptian troops in Gaza. Then Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, cutting the beleaguered country off from trade with East Africa and Asia. (The Suez Canal had already been closed to vessels to and from Israel.) The Dutch were willing to run the blockade in the Gulf of Aqaba but only with others, and the significant other, the United States, wouldn't think of it, not even Israel's putative great friend, Lyndon Johnson. The American guarantee that had persuaded Israel to evacuate the Sinai in 1957 had turned out to be no guarantee at all. So while the United States played for time, the Israelis were playing for their lives. They stood alone and fought alone, and they won't forget that they had only the handwringing of Washington on their side. What would have happened had they not succeeded in taking out virtually

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the entire Egyptian air force in the first few hours of June 5 is too horrendous to contemplate.

Historians these days speculate in what they call "counter-factuals." Suppose, then, that the Israelis had won the war but not held the West Bank. Of one thing we can be sure: there would not now be in the territories anything remotely like a Palestinian state. Palestinian nationalism would have been a secret, soundly kept in check by King Hussein. But if such an entity did exist, it would be neither democratic nor pluralistic nor even tolerant. Actually, no such order now exists anywhere in the Arab world; and the world of the Palestinians, despite its elegant and eloquent spokesmen and spokeswomen, is very much a part of that world. How else can we read the Palestinian enthusiasm for Saddam's Iraq? Such enthusiasm is not easily romanticized even by those who have romanticized the Soviets and the Chinese elites, the Cubans and the North Vietnamese.

On the right, however, romanticization is hardly the motive. In ratifying the extension of Syrian dominion over Lebanon, in certifying Iraq's established borders as inviolate, Messrs. Bush and Baker have assented to exquisite suffering as a quotidian fact of Arab political life. Their sympathy for the Palestinians is about as convincing as their sympathy for the Jews. We believe that even-handedness with reference to Israel and the Arab states would be an inappropriate U.S. policy in the Middle East: our country should not be neutral between a proven friend and habitual foes, between a democratic polity and seasoned tyrannies. But this administration is not even neutral. Since the Bush ascendancy America has clearly tilted against Israel. And it is not just atmospherics. We know, for example, what Washington wants from Israel in the early stages of negotiations. It wants Israel to give up settlements. But what does Washington want from the Arab states? Nothing discernible. In fact, it remains mute when Syria and its Lebanese satrap ignore the multilateral regional talks that Baker has touted as the innovative keystone of the peace process.

And what does Washington ultimately want from Israel? It has let slip that the United States still supports the right of refugee Arabs of 1948 (and their descendents) to return to their old homes in Haifa and Safed. Needless to say, this right of return does not, in the official American view, extend to uprooted Jews who not so long ago lived in Hebron and east Jerusalem. (Of course, those Jews who demand *their* right of return to Silwan don't acknowledge an Arab right to return to Baka.) The American reiteration of a U.N. resolution passed more than forty years ago encourages the Arab states, who need scarce encouragement, to magnify their demands. It also suggests the administration in fact accepts what the Israeli right has long charged: that what is at issue at the conference is not simply the occupied territories but the character of Jerusalem and of pre-1967 Israel itself.

Now, it would be good if Israel were able to ease its rule over the one-and-a-half million Arabs in the territories. Occupations debilitate occupied and occupiers alike. Maybe there is a formula, consistent with Israeli security, whereby the burden of the Jewish military presence could be lifted from the Palestinian Arabs and a measure of autonomy given them, of a kind no one contemplates for the Kurds or Shiites of Iraq or the Maronites of Lebanon. In the meantime it is instructive to note that both the administration (with its heavy-handed *obiter dicta*) and the Palestinians (by an intensification of terror) are doing everything they can to ensure a continuation of hard-line Likud government. Could it be that they know a genuinely conciliatory Labor government would preclude Washington from imposing its own preferred solutions on Jerusalem? But even these would not enhance the career of democracy and constitutionalism among the Arabs. Arab politics is what it is: the Palestinians will not suddenly produce the great exception. In any case, it is neither democracy nor constitutionalism that motivates Bush. He just wants to cut Israel down to size.

But doing so carries with it responsibilities that even an administration unfriendly to Israel will not be able to avoid. An Israel deprived of what it requires to defend itself will expect the United States to compensate for its loss of strategic advantages. This means that the United States would need to be committed to guaranteeing Israel's security against all foes. We might try to enmesh the U.N. in these assurances, but such an arrangement would add no moral authority to the enterprise, either for Israel or for the Arabs. The crucial ingredient, American will, would be suspect from the start, and the Arab states would test it relentlessly. It is not, moreover, just American politics that would cripple us, as it did in 1967, but the now permanently degraded state of our economy, a factor that does not explain American inaction twenty-five years ago. There is also the fact that no American guarantees, however well intended and however reliable, can possibly protect the Israelis from terrorism, that psychologically unnerving and politically destabilizing weapon of the displaced and the resentful.

What persuades the United States to become an instrument of this resentment against Israel? What concrete concerns do Americans have in the alleys of Nablus and Jenin? Not many. As it happens, Israel has a greater interest in finding a more peaceful way of living with its neighbors than we do. We can encourage the Israelis to be more daring in their concessions, more generous. But if we bully them into ceding those small margins of safety that may mean the difference between life and death, we are setting them up for a fall, and setting ourselves up for one too. In 1967, seeing that the United States would not honor our grave commitments to the Jewish state, Israel had the courage and wherewithal to strike for its own survival. In doing so it also served American interests well. The next time it won't be so easy. We should not push our luck. •

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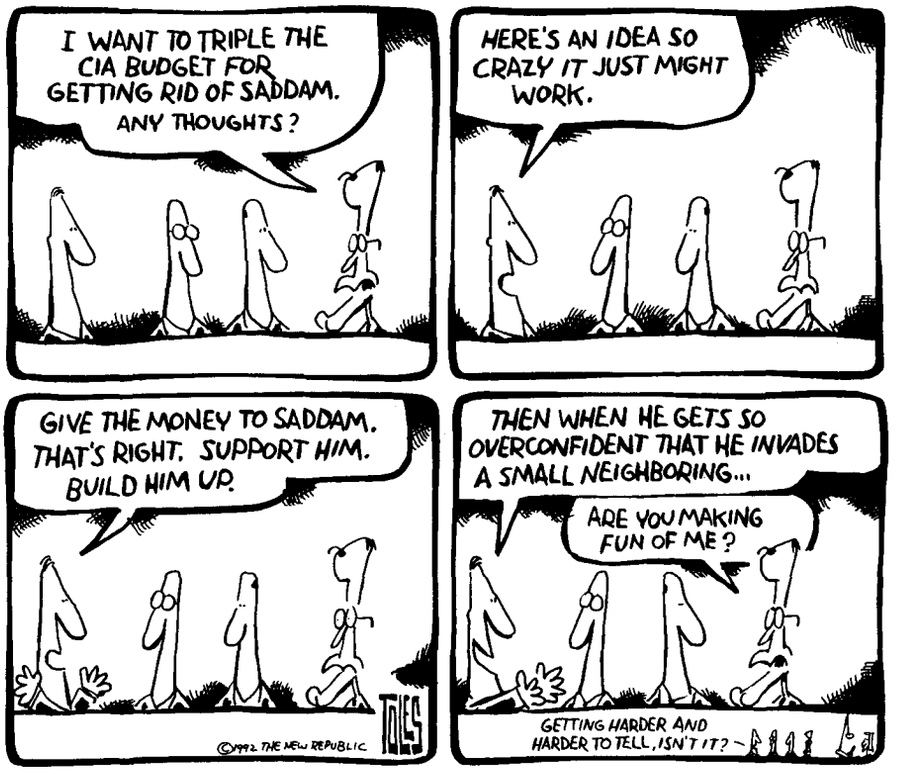
NOTEBOOK

BUSHISM OF THE WEEK: "We are going to keep pushing, because I think the six goals are sound—math and science, and nobody is too old to learn. It gets into your whole feeling of adult education. Tests—volunteer, but nevertheless standard, so a parent can tell how his or her kid adds up to others across the country. And these are good." —May 27, at a question-and-answer session with schoolchildren in Marietta, Georgia

POD WATCH: In the classic horror film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, citizens of an American town are possessed by malevolent aliens from outer space. Though they look and sound the same as they did as humans, the "pods" are transformed into automatons bent on world takeover. Some related phenomenon seems to have struck Washington, where underemployed policy heads and hacks from both parties wake up possessed by the alien spirit of Ross Perot. Unlike in the movie, the victims this time are willing—so desperate are they for a connection with any presidential administration that might one day call upon their services, not to mention the huge salaries promised by the campaign. This week's pods are Jeane Kirkpatrick and Hamilton Jordan. Kirkpatrick, the former ambassador to the United Nations, has somewhat elliptically nominated herself as Perot's running mate. "It's a very realistic possibility that I might support him," she said recently. "I agree with whoever thinks Perot and I can be a great team." Perhaps she misread the name as Peron. As for Jordan, Jimmy Carter's former chief of staff, he was recently sighted at Perot's Dallas headquarters, where he was allegedly interviewing for a top position in the campaign. Bolt the doors and board up the windows. They're coming. And they're hungry.


I WANT TO TRIPLE THE CIA BUDGET FOR GETTING RID OF SADDAM. ANY THOUGHTS?
HERE'S AN IDEA SO CRAZY IT JUST MIGHT WORK.
GIVE THE MONEY TO SADDAM. THAT'S RIGHT. SUPPORT HIM. BUILD HIM UP.
THEN WHEN HE GETS SO OVERCONFIDENT THAT HE INVADES A SMALL NEIGHBORING...
ARE YOU MAKING FUN OF ME?
GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO TELL, ISN'T IT?
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TOLES

HONORED: Gerald Ford hasn't had much to do since he left the Oval Office in 1977. It's apparent that the Gerald R. Ford Foundation in his hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan, doesn't have much to do either. The foundation's newsletter announces that "On March 19, the [Gerald R. Ford] Library issued its 2000th researcher card." The winner of this high honor, Scottie Peacock, was described by the newsletter as a "mini-celebrity" and was said to be "obviously delighted" to be awarded not just an autographed copy of Ford's *A Time to Heal*, but a Gerald R. Ford signature golf ball as well. Isn't that special.

OLD SPEAKERS NEVER DIE: TNR was a wee bit surprised to receive a piece of *franked* mail from former House Speaker Jim Wright, who resigned in disgrace more than two years ago. A phone call to the House clerk revealed that, according to law, former Speakers are considered a sort of historical national resource "like a presidential library." As such, they are entitled not only to continued franking privileges, but to office space equivalent to that which they enjoyed during their tenure as Speaker, a staff of three, and an "operational allowance" of up to $67,000 per annum. These benefits are ostensibly provided to allow the former Speakers to conclude their official business and make a smooth transition from public life. All three extant former speakers—Carl Albert, Tip O'Neill, and Jim Wright—continue to collect their allowances. According to Representative Porter J. Goss of Florida, the total yearly cost to taxpayers is approaching $1 million. He has introduced legislation mandating that in the future, old Speakers take a maximum of three years to fade away.

DEPARTMENTS: This week sees the initiation of a new, occasional feature, "Consumed" (see "Tooling Around," page 10), about the various horrors and pleasures of consumer culture. There'll be more in the months to come. •

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CONSUMED

TOOLING AROUND

By Jerry Adler

For many years my favorite shopping street in New York was Canal Street: that is, *west* of Broadway, a filthy and cacophonous district that displayed its merchandise on hooks and heaped in cardboard boxes—merchandise every bit as obscure in function and provenance as anything dredged from the bottom of the ocean. It was tools.

At the time I am writing about, I lived in a brownstone house in Brooklyn dating from the late years of the Industrial Revolution, bearing the marks of successive renovations every few decades until about 1955. Every part of the house was held together by screws, no two of which were of the same diameter, length, thread pitch, or head configuration. As each fell out of whatever was holding it, it had to be replaced with one a size bigger, so I had plenty of legitimate reasons to visit hardware stores. But I would be lying if I said that this was any more than a plausible excuse for the hours I spent rooting around in bins and trays and buckets and boxes of small miscellaneous metal objects. I was soaking up the culture.

Hardware! How many happy hours have I passed in the aisle of a Tru-Value Home Center, fingering the little bubble packs of washers and toggle bolts and angle irons, admiring the heft of the ball-peen hammers, the sharpness of the screwdriver blades, and the subtle variations of stiffness and taper that distinguish a putty knife from a taping knife. Hardware is my refuge from postindustrial civilization, with its clever ambiguities and paradoxes. In an intellectual milieu filled with nuance, hardware is exact to the sixty-fourth of an inch that separates the diameters of consecutively numbered drill bits. In a culture awash in irony, hardware is unself-conscious, direct, and functional. The semiotics of a rat-tail file, if it has any, are barely worth discussion. Anyone who has brought down a hammer on the head of a nail will forever after have no trouble with subject-object relations.

Hardware is a closed universe. There is a tool for every part, a part for every tool. This I realized one afternoon when it became necessary to change a washer in a shower valve. After removing the decorative bell from around the valve stem, I discovered that the packing nut was recessed more than a half-inch behind the surrounding wall, where I couldn't get a wrench around it. Well, to be honest, I didn't immediately grasp the impossibility of reaching it with a wrench. I spent maybe forty-five minutes trying every wrench I owned, succeeding only in inscribing a small crescent of scratches in the neighboring tiles. Then I tried my vise-grip pliers. I have a complete set of these, including the six-, eight-, and ten-inch sizes in both straight and offset configurations. I have never yet had to grab or squeeze something that one vise-grip pliers couldn't fit as well as any of the other five, but I know things like that must exist, or why would they have so many different kinds? I tried the whole set. Finally I walked two blocks to a hardware store and described my dilemma, whereupon the owner wordlessly produced a tool. The tool consisted in its entirety of a short length of pipe of hexagonal cross-section. I took it home, slipped one end over the nut, grasped the protruding end with a pipe wrench, and tugged; the nut loosened and slipped free.

The other thing this episode illustrates is that I was able to negotiate the purchase of this object without, to this day, having the faintest idea of what to call it, or even if it has a name. The culture of hardware is not merely preliterate, but pre-verbal. Early on I made the mistake of assuming that you buy hardware the way you buy, say, a steak: you address the person behind the counter and name the object you wish to purchase. That immediately stigmatizes you as the sort of person who went to college instead of welding school. In the first place, except for a handful of common objects, you're extremely unlikely even to know the name of the thing you want; and even if you succeed in somehow conveying the notion of it to the salesperson, you will immediately confront a series of questions (quarter-inch or five-sixteenths? brass or stainless? male or female?) you are embarrassingly unprepared to answer. The proper way to buy a piece of hardware is to bring the identical object to the store (either the broken one you're replacing or the same thing from another part of the house), drop it on the counter, point to it, and grunt.

Hardware nomenclature does acknowledge the written language, but in an endearingly native fashion: it names things after the letter of the alphabet whose shape they most resemble. Clamps aren't just clamps, they're C-clamps. Rings are, obviously, O-rings. I discovered this rule when I sought to purchase what I mentally envisioned as a kind of square duct with one open side. I needed this to enclose a segment of asbestos-coated steam pipe that had been installed flush to the ceiling of my boiler room. After considerable thought I decided to describe the object as a trough. My local sheet-metal dealer found this as baffling as if I had asked for it in Urdu. Finally, after much waving of hands and sketching, the light of comprehension dawned in his eyes. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "You want some *U-channel*."

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U-channel! Of course, that's what I wanted. In the last twenty years I have written hundreds of thousands of words, all of them in English, most of them published, and never once have I used a single letter with a fraction of the precision of that simple exclamation.

Hardware! It's better than books: you can take it apart, but you can never deconstruct it.

JERRY ADLER is a senior writer at *Newsweek*.

The buzz in California.

JUST SAY PEROT

By Sidney Blumenthal

LOS ANGELES

The last primary wasn't really a primary at all. It was a contest between rejected space and blank space. On the surface, it may appear that Clinton has tried everything and failed even in winning. By contrast, Perot has risked nothing and won everything. Clinton was unprepared for this, believing in advance that he could somehow finesse Perot by some sort of magic. Unlike Bush, Clinton has not had close dealings with Perot and is learning haphazardly, from telephoned reports and news clippings, about the billionaire messiah's eccentricities. From the anecdotal evidence percolating up to him—"Women who worked for Perot were required to wear nail polish?" remarked Clinton with amazed disbelief as he hung up the phone after one conversation—Clinton assumed that the fever about Perot would break and that he, Clinton, would be up for reassessment. He is still waiting.

Out past the ruins of L.A., in Orange and Ventura and San Bernardino counties, it is the day of the locust—for the moment, Perot's moment. The suburban districts here are the heart of the heart of the Republican constituency in the country—Nixon's and Reagan's base—which has carried the largest state for the GOP for decades. Now the California Dream has soured, and those who sought it see the Republican president as a pariah. The white-collar professionals and entrepreneurs who identified their fortunes with the party have become a lumpenbourgeoisie, undermined by the recession, under- and unemployed. Their anti-government platitudes of the 1980s have been turned into anti-political platitudes. Some of them are techies who believe firmly that technology would cure all ills if only politics weren't in the way. The narrowness of Perot the computer tycoon directly appeals to their narrowness. Why does Perot need a program when he knows how to insert the programming?

But Perot the savior gave a glimpse of his antediluvian mean-spiritedness on ABC's "20/20" when he announced that he would not hire gays or adulterers for government jobs. (The would-be national boss views laws like company rules.) His rationale was disingenuous and portentous. "I don't want anybody there that will be a point of controversy with the American people," he said. "It will distract from the work to be done." His idea of democracy is a tyranny of the majority guided by a maximum leader. "I'm buying it for the American people because they can't afford it," he said about the presidency. The next day, at a rally in Little Rock, he railed over and over: "We don't need any sissies around!" And he harped on the issue of "manhood."

Perot's homophobia had a galvanizing effect on gay voters in California. In the late 1960s, while Perot was paying for rallies for Nixon, David Mixner, the most prominent gay political consultant in L.A., was mobilizing the Vietnam Moratorium. Now he is working for his old friend from the anti-war days, Bill Clinton. For gays, perhaps more than any other group, Clinton is a cause. Mixner is circulating hundreds of tapes of Clinton's impassioned speech in favor of gay rights. He has raised $2 million to spend on behalf of Clinton in L.A. alone. On computer file, he has 103,000 identifiable gay voters just in L.A. County. "We're light years ahead of four years ago," he says. "We're building a voting bloc that will vote as a bloc." Mixner estimates that gays nationally may roughly equal the black vote in turnout. "We'll get 90 to 95 percent for Clinton."

Perot's gay-bashing forced some to disembark from the ship of fools. For three hours Jesse Jackson, whose every political instinct this year has been self-destructive, met alone with Perot. ("Magnificent," one of Jackson's advisers told a Clinton aide about Perot.) Perot had appeared as a golden opportunity for gamesmanship. But his anti-gay comment made it impossible for the leader of the Rainbow Coalition to play with him. As suddenly as it began, the courtship was over. Perot the outsider also assiduously devoted days to quietly pursuing Washington and New York insiders. "I have no handlers," said Perot as he lured Ed Rollins, former Reagan manager, and Hamilton Jordan, former Carter manager, to handle him.

While the man above the fray went blithely on, Clinton contemplated his own wounds. At the home of his friend and adviser, Derek Shearer, he told me that the primaries, the mechanism that has made him the nominee, has paradoxically robbed him of his audience. "It was the early months of the campaign that makes it hard for me to communicate now," he said. The so-called "character" issue has led to Clinton's being cast in the same tainted category with Bush as merely a politician—therefore ineffective, therefore dismissed. In California, in fact, he was still giving eloquent speeches about race and economics, even engaging in his own Hollywood critique, chiding movie executives at a meeting at Sony Studio for "desensitizing" people to social problems by exploitative violence. But

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throughout, it was as though the mute button were on.

His campaign in California could not compensate. His worthy, prolix speeches often buried his themes in details of substance, setting a standard no one else has met but for which he is unrewarded. His imagistically impoverished commercials barely presented a shred of an aspect of persuasion. They showed him sitting alone, speaking to someone off-camera about the middle class being "mad." He sounded as though he were reading a report of a focus group. Another ad, about education, depicted a jerky series of Clinton pictures with children and urged voters to write for "the plan." His ads were uncoordinated with his speeches, making it still harder for him to bring the images of his campaign to bear meaningfully upon his words. The blurry effect has, moreover, reinforced implicitly his image as calculating, as someone whose lack of clarity is deliberate. Time and again, his campaign's incapacity to explain and emphasize his message has made it appear that he does not have it. Isolation is a natural consequence.

In California, however, no one is both more defined and more isolated than George Bush. He campaigns by a process of self-cancellation, taking no stand, then taking one, then fudging or denying it. Anytime he appears or speaks, he discredits the idea that politics can accomplish anything. When Bush came to L.A., he ratified for the voters that he would do nothing in the aftermath of the riots. He talked about the lack of funds, attacked environmentalists, and at a black grammar school, shadowboxed with a little kid for the cameras.

The California primary made clear the shattering of the old order, the old reflexes, the old dogmas. In the Republican senatorial primaries, only one of the law-and-order, anti-choice candidates—Bruce Herschensohn—won. Major Republican defections should be expected because more than 70 percent now say they're pro-choice. On the Democratic side, both women candidates, Barbara Boxer (who defied damage due to checks bounced at the House bank) and Dianne Feinstein (depicted in an ad by her opponent as the Golden State version of Leona Helmsley, for charges of financial irregularities), easily won. And Representative Mel Levine, who had staked all in his bid for the Senate nomination on a harsh law-and-order TV spot, saw his rising polls suddenly reverse and crash.

The rise of Perot reflects the greater reordering. He is the symptom of an uncontrollable process he has not yet imagined might also be out of his control. Perot is a solvent, accelerating the disintegration of old bonds. He has sharply turned the campaign to the theme of change and activism. His anti-political contention, however, does not answer the question, but begs it: How can a president be effective? Bush, by his very nature, cannot pose as an alternative. Thus the clash: Perot seems to be able to do everything because he is not a politician; Clinton can't do anything because he is. Inescapably, Clinton must demonstrate superior and subtle political arts against the most potent anti-politician he has yet encountered. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

INSURRECTION

By Fred Barnes

The day after he zinged Murphy Brown, Vice President Dan Quayle talked to President Bush by car phone as he sped across Los Angeles in a motorcade. There was an air of urgency. Reporters were pressuring Quayle to embroider his attack on the TV character and, in Washington, the press was hectoring the White House for Bush's response. Quayle, before speaking publicly again, wanted to make sure he and Bush were saying the same thing. On the phone they agreed that's exactly what they'd do. Only that's not the way it turned out. Quayle went on offense, Bush hunkered down, and it became a telling episode.

Following the phone call Quayle stepped up his assault. The plot of the television show—Murphy Brown had a baby but spurned the father—was, Quayle insisted, "typical Hollywood... Hollywood thinks it's cute to glamorize illegitimacy. Hollywood doesn't get it." At roughly the same time back at the White House, Bush used a press conference with Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to address the Brown flap. He said children were better off having the "love and care and attention" of a mother and a father. But, he added, "I'm not going to get into the details of a very popular television show."

What's so telling about this episode? Two things. First, it neatly contrasts Quayle's political instincts with Bush's. Quayle is drawn to values issues—illegitimacy, in this case—of the old Reagan variety. He courts controversy (and risks being ridiculed) to get his point heard. Bush is willing to exploit values issues, but does so hesitantly and rarely makes news. True, Bush wasn't so fastidious during the 1988 campaign when he assaulted Michael Dukakis. Then Bush had bellicose advisers, Lee Atwater and Roger Ailes, who offset his own caution. Now they're gone, and Bush has surrounded himself with timid aides. If a Pledge of Allegiance or Willie Horton issue comes along in 1992, the new Bush coterie will probably shy away from using it. Quayle and his advisers won't.

Second, Quayle has emerged as a factor in domestic policy because he's willing to stake out strong positions. The White House straggles behind, often endorsing the Quayle position later. This happened on school choice, legal reform, and deregulation. Now Quayle has moved values to a higher spot on the Bush agenda. Initially only a few White House officials—domestic policy czar Clayton Yeutter, personnel chief Constance Horner, Jay Lefkowitz, Leigh Ann Metzger—were in favor of Quayle's Hollywood theme. Samuel Skinner, Bush's chief of staff,

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brusquely informed a member of the Quayle entourage who defended the Murphy Brown attack as a winner: "That's not the majority view around here." But it soon was. Bush and Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater later concluded they had screwed up in appearing to distance themselves from Quayle. "The vice president helped himself," Fitzwater says. "He broke through."

Breaking through was no accident. Quayle follows a simple rule of thumb, an adviser says, in getting out his message: "You have to create conflict and controversy to communicate in the political world." Bush creates neither, which is one reason he communicates so poorly. Quayle had originally planned to devote his speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco on May 19 to U.S.-Japan relations. That seemed appropriate, since he was scheduled to visit Japan the week before. The L.A. riot prompted him to change the subject. So before leaving for Japan, Quayle met with his speechwriters to discuss a speech on values. He threw out the idea of citing the bad effect of Hollywood on America's values. Speechwriter Lisa Schiffren brought up Murphy Brown. Quayle had never seen the show, but he'd read that real-life anchorwomen had appeared on it, blessing Murphy Brown's unwed motherhood. Quayle was appalled. He liked the idea of throwing a dart at the show. The first draft, faxed to Quayle in Japan, included criticism of the TV character. Quayle tinkered with the speech, rewriting parts on his home computer upon returning to Washington, but the Murphy Brown passage stayed.

Quayle and his staff expected the TV zinger to attract attention, but nothing like what it got. Quayle was better grounded in the broad neocon argument than the Hollywood part of it. He'd met over breakfast with James Q. Wilson, the political scientist at UCLA, to discuss the L.A. riots. He'd summoned Charles Murray, the American Enterprise Institute scholar, to discuss welfare. He'd even eaten lunch with Catholic thinkers Michael Novak and George Weigel to talk about abortion. But he hadn't consulted anyone about Hollywood.

After the speech Quayle flew from San Francisco to Palm Springs and later that day to Los Angeles, and huddled with his staff on the plane. Quayle's instinct was to expand his attack beyond Murphy Brown. His staff agreed. "If you just try to defend your ground, it's perceived as weakness," says one of the participants in the strategy session. "You have to move forward. You have to move another step forward." Quayle did, indicting all Hollywood. Two days after the speech, Quayle took another step. At a private GOP fund-raiser in Washington, flacked to the press, Quayle said he didn't regret a word and went on to attack "deadbeat dads."

From the beginning, the White House response was to keep Bush out of the Murphy Brown flap, while preserving the values issue. Fitzwater's first response was to denounce TV's "glorification of life as an unwed mother." A few minutes later he made what he now calls a "tragic mistake." He praised Murphy Brown, noting she'd rejected an abortion. (Fitzwater says he was joking.) That produced a split between the White House and Quayle, always a story. Bush compounded the problem by making it sound as if he feared criticizing a popular show. Fitzwater says Bush was merely "trying to stay on the high road."

Polls suggest otherwise, but Quayle aides believe he's been on a roll since he spoke at the American Bar Association last August. That's when he attacked lawyers, spelled out a legal reform proposal, and reluctantly debated ABA President John J. Curtin. The debate made news, and legal reform was anointed as one of the "five pillars" of the Bush domestic agenda. Quayle's tactic on school choice was more daring. The administration in 1990 hadn't made up its mind whether choice should include use of a voucher at private as well as public schools. In a speech to the Hudson Institute in Indianapolis that fall, Quayle acted as if it had. He extolled the choice plan in Milwaukee. He also endorsed the proposed plan in Oregon, which would offer a $2,500 refundable tax credit to pay for a private school. "You can bet the education establishment will oppose this reform," Quayle said. He was right. But the effect of his speech, and his lobbying, was that private school choice became part of Bush's education package.

How does Quayle get away with this free-lancing? He is not Spiro Agnew to Bush's Richard Nixon. Agnew was assigned tasks, targets, speech subjects. Quayle was given the space issue, a Competitiveness Council that had no authority, and little more. He's made his own issues, and Bush goes along. Some Quayle aides suspect that Bush purposely gives Quayle the freedom that he never had as Ronald Reagan's vice president. Bush had to parrot Reagan, if only because conservatives were sure to mug him over any deviation. Bush also couldn't look too vigorous, for fear of showing up Reagan's laid-back style. So he sat tight for eight years. "Quayle speaks up, and Bush respects that," says Ailes, Bush's former media adviser. Only once has the president muzzled Quayle. That was when the veep criticized Mikhail Gorbachev, while Bush was still romancing the Soviet leader. On Murphy Brown, Bush was tolerant. When this happens, the next step is for Bush to echo Quayle, which means attacking Hollywood. Count on it. •

Rio's two-faced impresario.

STRONG'S WRONGS

By David Segal

In a lecture published in February by an Ottawa think tank called the North-South Institute, Maurice Strong, the secretary-general of the Earth Summit in Rio, declared: "Frankly, we may get to the point where the only way of saving the world will be for industrial civilization to collapse." For anyone who

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doubted the gravity of the situation he added, "If we don't change, our species will not survive."

Environmentalists are known for hyperbole, but don't dismiss Strong as just another alarmist greenie. In fact, he is exactly the kind of rapacious businessman that enviros routinely decry for the damage they do to the Earth.

One of Strong's earliest jobs was working for an oil company in the Middle East and Africa, scouting out locations for service stations and training the locals to operate them. He then started his own graphite mine in Tanzania. Returning to Canada, he made a small fortune through stock options with Dome Petroleum, where he worked as a finance executive. He then made a big fortune on his own by financing Ajax Petroleums Ltd., a faltering gas company that he merged with two gas distributors to produce Norcen Energy Resource Ltd., one of Canada's major energy conglomerates. In 1976, already a millionaire many times over, Strong convinced his friend Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that Canada needed a seminational oil concern. Trudeau named him president of Petro-Canada.

Strong's most ecologically incorrect deal involved the Baca Ranch, which he came to possess in 1978, when he and a group of investors took control of an oil exploration and livestock company called Arizona Land and Cattle (AZL). The ranch contains 110,000 acres of land in the San Luis Valley of south central Colorado, which sits atop one of the West's largest aquifers. In October 1985 Strong founded and named himself president of American Water Development Inc., and packed the board of directors with luminaries such as ex-Colorado Governor Richard Lamm and former EPA head William Ruckelshaus. He then lobbied valley residents to support his water rights application, telling them he would use the water to start a brewery and a high-altitude farm to grow high-protein grains. Neither threatened the environment, and both promised jobs to an area with a 17 percent unemployment rate.

But when Strong submitted the application on December 31, 1986, it was for 200,000 acre feet (one acre of water, one foot deep) of water annually, enough to do serious damage to the area's ecosystem and many times what was required for his projects. According to a deposition submitted by one of Strong's partners, David Williams, the real plan had been discussed as early as 1983. Strong planned to pipe the water out of the valley and into the Denver suburbs, where it would fetch hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Local residents formed the Citizens for San Luis Valley Water to fight the scheme while a group of ditch companies and water conservation districts fought AWDI in thirty-eight court hearings in Colorado's Third District Water Court. Experts from the Colorado State Wildlife Federation, the State Department of Natural Resources, and the National Forest Service told the court that the AWDI scheme would destroy the area wetlands, devastate the valley's bird population (one of the most diverse in North America), and kill local vegetation, causing a disastrous increase in wind erosion. Dr. Dion Stewart, a professor of geology at Adams State College in Colorado, said the plan would lower the water table by two to three feet and destroy the Great Sand Dunes National Park located on the southern border of the Baca Ranch, where the desert sequences in *Star Wars* were filmed.

AWDI lost the case and is appealing it to the Colorado Supreme Court. Meanwhile, Judge Robert Ogburn has ruled that the company must pay $2.7 million in court expenses to the coalition of forces that opposed the scheme. Strong quit AWDI in December 1989—two months before he was tapped to head the Rio summit—when, he claims, he realized his partners, who included Canadian corporate raider Sam Belzberg, were getting greedy. "They were mesmerized by the numbers," he told Canada's *Financial Post*. "I wanted to develop it in an environmentally safe way." When he quit, he did try to give his shares to the Fetzer Foundation, an organization dedicated to the paranormal, but his partners retrieved them by exercising their right of first refusal. But Strong retains a 2 percent share in any future royalties, no small change. Colorado newspapers have reported that AWDI stands to earn $1.6 billion if it ever begins operating.

Strong's behavior has been a financial scandal as well as an environmental one. While chairman and major stockholder in AZL—which was part owned by Adnan Khashoggi, the billionaire Saudi arms dealer—Strong hyped the company by putting out word it was on the verge of merger. Between 1981 and '82, the stock skyrocketed from $12 to $32 per share. But after Strong conceded that no merger was in sight, the stock plummeted to $4 a share. A class action suit for stock misrepresentation and fraud against Strong and others was brought in Massachusetts, where a number of stock purchasers sued for the difference between AZL's actual value and its inflated value after Strong's p.r. campaign. In 1989 Strong and his co-defendants settled the suit out of court for $6.4 million.

Throughout these shenanigans, Strong has kept a high profile in the environmental movement. In 1966 he was asked by then Prime Minister Lester Pearson to head Canada's foreign aid program, a job that in 1970 brought him to the attention of U Thant, the secretary-general of the U.N., who asked Strong to head the Conference on the Human Environment, which was then in the planning phase. In Stockholm in 1972 he chaired what was essentially the original Earth Summit. (A cautionary note to leaders heading to Rio: the only heads of state who went to Stockholm were Indira Gandhi and Olof Palme.) Strong returned to the U.N. in 1985 to head its African famine relief program and again in 1989 when he was asked to organize the Rio Earth Summit.

Strong's ability to straddle two worlds sometimes raises eyebrows, but his flaky connections seem to assuage the earth-firsters. Strong's wife, Hanne, runs the Manitou Foundation, otherwise known as the Valley of Refuge in World Truth, located on the Baca Ranch. Started in the early '80s, the foundation supplies plots of land to

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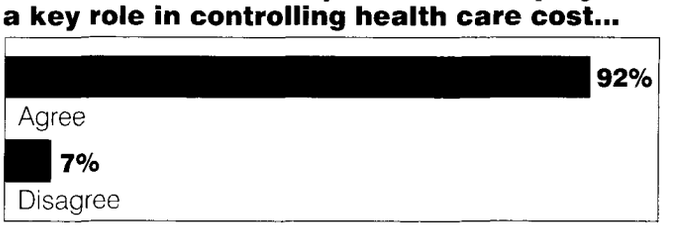

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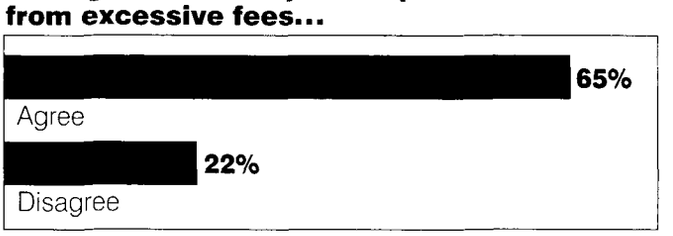

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the Haidakhandi Universal Ashram, the Sri Aurobindo Learning Center, Carmelite nuns, and anyone else who will "provide a forum and example to which the world will be able to turn in times of crisis, transition, and renewal." This apparently includes Bill Moyers, who visited and, according to an account in Manitou's press packet, "told Maurice, as they sat below the thunderbolt mountain, that he could feel the power emanating from the earth. Minutes later, she [Hanne] says, a nearby bush burst into flame."

There have been grumblings in the environmental world that in the pre-summit negotiations Strong's overly cozy relationship with industry helped defang the treaties being signed in Rio. Most concern has been centered on the Business Council for Sustainable Development, a collection of forty-eight multinationals that was formed at Strong's behest. It is headed by Stephan Schmidheiny, a Swiss billionaire whose assets include a 30 percent interest in Chile's largest steelmaking company, Compania de Acero del Pacifico. The BCSD participated in the summit's preparatory discussions and, according to Roger Wilson, political director of Greenpeace International, is not sure it wants to take on the environmental demons the summit was supposed to slay. "Their position on global warming is basically a fudge," says Wilson. "They'll talk about moving away from coal, but that's as far as it goes."

The Rio summit will produce little more than statements of good intentions, but for Strong it represents the ultimate intersection of his dual life. Strong the oil tycoon and Maurice the prophet of environmental doom overlap in a love of grand visions and a contradictory philosophy that says, in essence, Think globally, dig locally.

DAVID SEGAL is a Washington writer.

Sarajevo revisited.

SERBICIDE

By Michael Lind

There will be more images in the weeks ahead like the scene of slaughter in the Sarajevo bread line on May 27. On May 30, just before the United Nations joined the European Community in imposing stiff sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro, the Milosevic regime once again signaled its contempt for a feeble "international community" with renewed shelling in Sarajevo and a surprise attack ending the truce in Dubrovnik. That contempt has been earned by the dramatic failure of international institutions such as the U.N., which brokered a truce on June 1 that was simply ignored.

The skit has been replayed many times in the year-old Balkan war: NATO and E.C. foreign and defense ministers announce that they are drafting new plans for collective intervention in regional conflicts; an avuncular representative of this or that international organization (the U.N., the Red Cross, the World Health Organization) announces that all parties in the conflict are on the verge of agreement on a humanitarian cease-fire; at which point scores of new innocents are bombed, shot, axed to death, burned, starved, or expelled from their homes. On January 7, after U.N. special envoy Cyrus Vance had announced the fifteenth cease-fire in the Croatian conflict, the Serb-controlled Yugoslav air force shot down an E.C. observation helicopter in northeast Croatia, killing all five on board. Last April, just days after the E.C. announced that it had brokered a peaceful compromise on Bosnian independence, the civilian head of the U.N. peacekeeping operation in Sarajevo, Cedric Thornberry, had to flee a Serb-Muslim shoot-out at his headquarters in the Holiday Inn.

Meanwhile, the Croats and the Muslims, who have lost a third of Croatia and two-thirds of Bosnia to Belgrade-sponsored partisans, have not been able to apply for arms from international bodies. The 14,000-man U.N. peacekeeping force in Croatia, installed with the consent of both sides, has not been able to end "ethnic cleansing" in the areas the Serbs control, or to permit expelled Croats to return home. And the news from the Bosnian front is that the U.N., E.C., and Red Cross teams are once again under fire.

Compared with the Bush administration, however, the E.C. and the U.N. have been models of decisive action. For eleven months the administration watched with complete passivity and, when it acted at all, blamed the victims. In June 1991, when Croatian and Slovenian secession was imminent, the United States hinted at the imposition of crippling international economic isolation on Croatia and Slovenia. The administration's rationale was that in order to keep the Soviet Union intact and Gorbachev in power, breakaway republics in other parts of the world should be dealt with firmly. Last winter, when Germany, flooded with Croatian refugees, pressed the E.C. to recognize Croatia and Slovenia, the United States once again feigned shock that Germany should disrupt allied decision-making procedures. Whispers in Washington, as in Paris and London, echoed the state-controlled Serbian media's propaganda line that Germany was trying to create a Fourth Reich. Suddenly, at a May 24 conference in Lisbon, Secretary of State James Baker—who had earlier chastised Croatia, Slovenia, and Germany for destroying the Yugoslav federation—could be heard chiding the Europeans for their reluctance to punish Serbia.

At least the United States and its European allies have now admitted that this is not just "ethnic strife" in a "federal state"—as though Sarajevo were L.A.—but a

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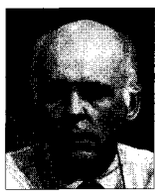

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coordinated attempt by Serbian partisans and the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army to carve a Greater Serbia out of neighboring republics. Unfortunately, the U.N. sanctions, even the oil embargo, are unlikely to check the Serbs, unless coupled with the kinds of military action—naval blockades, control of Bosnian air space—that neither the Americans nor the Europeans are yet willing to undertake. President Slobodan Milosevic, claiming victory in the controlled parliamentary elections that followed the imposition of U.N. sanctions, appears determined to press on.

For months there has been much brave talk among the allies of joint forces for emergencies just like this. And the Gulf war proved that where the interests of many states converge, an effective coalition can be thrown together in a hurry. But during this crisis, there has been no coordinating Great Power with the will to marshal an international coalition. And at each juncture widespread confusion has reigned over which organization or acronym would do the organizing: NATO, WEU, the E.C., or the U.N.? The Western allies act as though a permanent bureaucratic structure must be agreed upon before there can be any collective military response to the greatest European "contingency" since World War II.

A big part of the problem is disagreement about the power structure in post-cold war Europe. The United States seeks to maintain military hegemony and political influence in Europe through NATO. The British hope at once to maintain the Anglo-American special relationship and contain Germany by combining NATO and the WEU. The French, favoring an independent E.C. defense identity based on a Franco-German partnership, wish to keep the Anglo-Saxons out and the Germans down. (French officials have speculated that the real motive for Baker's lecture to the Europeans on Balkan policy was annoyance at the newly announced 35,000 member Franco-German corps.) The Germans simply are confused, though they show signs of a fitful, emergency-driven unilateralism that might, in time, become a Teutonic Gaullism. But the new superpower they clearly are not.

Even the sensible British plan for a strong WEU as a bridge between NATO and an enlarged, market-friendly E.C. suffers from the design defect of all collective security arrangements—the benefits are concentrated, while the obligations are shared. Calling the Balkan crisis "European" or "global" does not alter the fact that it affects Germany and Austria far more than it does France or Britain, to say nothing of the United States. Even the spilling of the war into Albania might not be enough to provoke a U.S. military response, unless Turkey or Russia were drawn into the conflict.

In other circumstances, the divergence of interests among NATO allies has not prevented unilateral action by the power most concerned—the United States in the Caribbean and Latin America, Britain in the Falklands, France in North and West Africa. One step toward addressing the major cause of the Yugoslav crisis might be the arming, by Germany and others in the vicinity, of the republics resisting Serbian aggression. But Germany's allies would resist this option, even if it could be thinkable for a German public disoriented by unification, haunted by Nazi and Communist legacies, and divided between those who want united Germany to be Sweden and those who want it to be Switzerland.

So there probably will be more talk of international institutions promoting international arbitration resulting in verdicts to be carried out by international constabularies—and southeastern Europe will continue to burn. "Covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to compel a man at all," wrote Hobbes. In the Balkans those Western powers that demonstrated their willingness to use force against revanchist despotisms on other occasions—the United States, Britain, and France—lack vital interests. Germany has vital interests but lacks the confidence to resort, indirectly or directly, to arms. So superannuated diplomats such as Cyrus Vance will continue their internationalist shuttling to nowhere and to no avail. The tragedy of Sarajevo in 1914 was that too many great powers were willing to intervene in the Balkans. The Sarajevo tragedy of 1992 is that there is not even one.

MICHAEL LIND is executive editor of *The National Interest.*

The State Department vs. the Kurds.

NO WAY OUT

By Wendy Herzog

Recently I was asked to travel to northern Iraq as part of a delegation funded by the National Endowment for Democracy to observe the Kurdish elections held on May 19 inside the U.N. Security Zone. Monitoring this democratic exercise, which resulted in the election of 105 assembly members and a draw between the two major leadership candidates, seemed a rare opportunity to do right by the Kurds after the fiasco at the end of the Gulf war, when the United States failed to support their insurrection, which it had encouraged, or to protect them from Saddam's wrath after it failed. Despite this earlier betrayal, the Iraqi Kurds requested, and very much desired, an American presence.

The State Department, however, seemed unimpressed by the idea of a Kurdish election. It not only declined to send official observers, it refused to validate the passports of Americans who wished to travel to Iraq as observers. When I called the Iraqi desk at State to let the relevant authorities know I was going, the first desk

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officer with whom I spoke said that my trip would be illegal without a validated passport. But don't worry, he added kindly, they wouldn't prosecute me. Feeling less than completely reassured, I naively suggested that State should validate my passport. No, said the officer, because we don't want you to go, and proceeded to give me the reasons why.

First, the department was worried about my personal safety. That was reasonable, but not terribly convincing. More to the point, it seems, were the policy reasons. The Department was afraid that a U.S. presence at the elections would lend credibility to Saddam's expected denunciation of the election as a CIA/Zionist conspiracy. Our presence might cause the "Arab Street" to rise up against the West. (Remember that argument from the fall of 1990, when many Arabists claimed that a U.S. attack on Saddam would result in a similar mass uprising?) Lastly, and most extraordinarily, the official pointed out that Egypt and Syria objected to a U.S. presence at the elections.

It seems, however, that the policy had not been thought out prior to my call. In fact, another Hill staffer was told by another official on the Iraqi desk that State would validate my passport just minutes after I was first told it would not. This offer was later rescinded. In my follow-up calls, I was advised that the trip would be illegal, that it would be illegal but wouldn't be prosecuted, that it could be illegal and could be prosecuted, and so on. Meanwhile, a lawyer at State noted with some alarm that it was a felony we were talking about. Still, no one was willing to answer my simple question: Would it violate the prohibition on the use of U.S. passports for travel to Iraq if I crossed from Turkey into the Security Zone in northern Iraq for the purpose of observing the Kurdish elections?

Then our group received a response from Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs Janet Mullins to a letter from Representative Lee Hamilton encouraging State's cooperation with our trip. Citing safety reasons for the refusal to validate U.S. passports, she veered from the "don't worry, we won't prosecute" line to the line that "violation of those [economic] sanctions, or violation on [sic] the use of the U.S. passport, are subject to enforcement action." Yet Mullins stopped short of saying the trip would violate the law.

The sanctions argument seemed irrelevant, since the purpose of the trip wasn't to do business with the Iraqis. In any event, it was hard to imagine that an administration that managed to overlook Iraq's apparent conversion of $2 billion or $3 billion in agricultural credits into military hardware through the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro would prosecute us for violating economic sanctions.

As I finally discovered, State can validate passports for travel to Iraq if it deems such travel to be in the national interest. But at the end of three days on the phone, I still couldn't determine whether officials there really thought my trip was going to violate the passport restrictions, or why it was not in the national interest for me to go there. And then too, last I checked, the Justice Department, not the State Department, makes decisions on prosecutions.

Instinctively cautious about legal matters, I decided not to go. It was a difficult decision, because the State Department's refusal to validate our passports reflects a policy with which I strongly disagree. A number of European legislators, several Kurdish members of the Turkish parliament, representatives of human rights groups, and a few U.S. journalists (who are exempt from the passport restrictions) did go and returned intact. Their presence was greatly appreciated. The elections went off without incident, with the U.S. military increasing its overhead flights on election day and effectively deterring interference from Saddam.

In her letter conveying the State Department's opposition to an American presence, Mullins added: "We have suggested to the Iraqi Kurdish leadership that, if electoral observers are deemed necessary, they seek them from any of the growing number of democracies around the world." So much for the New World Order, I guess.

WENDY HERZOG is staff director to Democratic Representative Ben Jones of Georgia.

Detroit's victory over Mazda.

MINIBAN

By James Bovard

The U.S. government is on the verge of adding thousands of dollars to the price of new minivans, a decision that could lead to price gouging on almost all automobile sales. Last year Commerce Department officials urged the Big Three automakers to formally accuse Japanese companies of dumping minivans in the United States. On May 19 Commerce pronounced Toyota and Mazda guilty. The U.S. International Trade Commission will rule on June 24 whether American makers have been injured by the dumping.

The U.S. dumping law prohibits foreign companies from selling products in the United States for less than their foreign price or their cost of production. Commerce has rigged this case by manipulating the numbers to boost Mazda's and Toyota's apparent production costs—and to lower their apparent U.S. sale price. It thereby created a foreign cost/U.S. price gap that it cited as proof of unfair trade.

This is a bizarre case. Domestic companies account for more than 90 percent of the minivan market, and Japanese minivans tend to be significantly higher priced (and higher quality) than U.S. ones. Yet, according to the Big Three's complaints, a trickle of high-priced

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imports are devastating the U.S. auto industry.

Although the Commerce Department convicts 97 percent of the foreign companies it investigates, it attacked the minivan case with a rare vengeance. At one point it had four verification teams in Japan rummaging through the confidential records of Toyota and its suppliers. Commerce made eleven sweeping demands for information from Toyota; Toyota responded to one with thirteen boxes of computer printouts. The department apparently spent so much money going after Toyota and Mazda that it has almost exhausted its annual budget for import-related computer work and is postponing work on many other dumping cases.

Toyota's and Mazda's primary crime was failing to make large profits. U.S. dumping law, inspired by medieval scholastics, requires foreign companies to earn at least an 8 percent profit on their U.S. sales (the average U.S. corporate profit in a good year is 5 percent to 6 percent). Toyota's "dumping" margin was 6.75 percent and Mazda's was 12.7 percent. If not for the 8 percent rule, Toyota would be innocent and most of Mazda's margin would have evaporated. Toyota is also being penalized because some of its operations are not sufficiently bureaucratic; U.S. law declares that foreign companies are cheating unless they spend at least 10 percent of their cost of production on administrative overhead.

Based largely on allegations by Ford engineers, Commerce investigators asserted that Toyota was not paying enough for parts from some of its related companies. Commerce also claimed that Toyota's current prices did not account for *future* minivan research and development—a novelty in the annals of cost accounting. Mazda was convicted partly because, in many cases, Commerce compared the cost of building new MPVs in Japan with the sale price of used MPVs in the United States. Mazda was also skewered because Commerce chose an abnormally long period—October 1990 through May 1991, instead of the usual six months—to compare U.S. prices and Japanese costs, and made no adjustments for gyrations in exchange rates during the Gulf war. Deputy Assistant Commerce Secretary Francis Sailer admitted in an August 12, 1991, internal memo that dollar/yen exchange rate fluctuations by themselves would add 1.9 percent to Mazda's dumping margin.

The case is now before the International Trade Commission, where a peculiar concept of trade law comes in. A foreign company can be convicted of injuring an American company if the latter's prices would have been higher without foreign competition. So Japanese producers can be found guilty if their minivan sales resulted in "price suppression"—i.e., preventing the Big Three from charging more. This may be the most anti-consumer regulation in the federal statute book.

The U.S. minivan industry has probably been hurt more by *Consumer Reports* than by imports. Last year the magazine headlined a story on the faulty automatic transmissions used in most Chrysler minivans: "It's a Lemon—Steer Clear." It noted that Ford's Aerostar suffered from "slow and clumsy routine handling; even more sluggish in accident-avoidance maneuvers ... harsh, bounding ride ... haphazard controls." General Motors has foundered partly because of the weird design of its APV minivan; one GM manager told *The New York Times* that it "looks like a dustbuster."

Chrysler has dominated the minivan market since 1983, and, according to Chrysler counsel John Greenwald, "We rely on the minivan business for a disproportionate share of our profits." *Ward's Auto World* estimated in 1990 that Chrysler made $5,000 gross profit on each minivan it sold. That is a profit ratio of up to 30 percent—which is now being threatened by competition from imports. Chrysler Vice President for Washington affairs Robert Perkins moaned to the ITC on May 21, "I can unequivocally tell you that stiff competition from the new Japanese imports was a very key factor in our decision to [offer consumer rebates] on these vehicles.... Profits really fell off."

Perhaps the most creative argument advanced in this case is that Japanese minivan imports somehow destroyed Chrysler's credit rating. Perkins complained that minivan imports were the key to Standard and Poor's downgrading Chrysler's credit rating in 1990: "The loss of our investment grade credit rating has cost us millions, tens, hundreds of millions of dollars in added interest costs." Greenwald told the ITC, "The impact of competition in the minivan sector on Chrysler's debt rating dwarfs everything else ... in terms of palpable injury." Actually, Chrysler is declining toward a junk bond rating because it has foisted so many lemons on the American public.

There are other twists. More than half the minivans Chrysler sells in the United States are made in Canada. Thus it is arguing the U.S. government should force American consumers to pay higher prices in part because its Canadian operations have lost business to Japanese competition. Though Ford has spent a small fortune prosecuting this case, it owns 25 percent of Mazda's stock—and will soon begin selling a new minivan jointly developed with Nissan.

Unfortunately for the Japanese, the ITC is stacked. There are six commissioners and, in tie votes, foreigners are found guilty. This may be the only judicial institution in the government where a deadlock among the judges results in penalties on the accused.

If the ITC finds injury, Mazda will be forced to raise its minivan prices by up to $2,700 and Toyota by up to $1,700; the Big Three's prices will assuredly also rise. The Japanese companies' prices will also be put under the perennial supervision of Commerce bureaucrats devoted to protecting the domestic auto industry. And that's not all. Red Poling, CEO of Ford, indicated to the *Detroit News* last month that the Big Three may soon file an anti-dumping suit against luxury car imports. Dumping cases on sports utility vehicles may soon follow. The lesson: buy now.

JAMES BOVARD is the author of *The Fair Trade Fraud* (St. Martin's Press).

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The ugly truth about America's future.

THE END OF EQUALITY

By Mickey Kaus

For three presidential elections, Democratic candidates have been lamenting the loss of "good" middle-class jobs. In 1984 Walter Mondale declared in his acceptance speech that "the help-wanted ads are full of listings for executives, and for dish washers—but not much in between." In 1988 Michael Dukakis pledged to create "good jobs at good wages." In 1992 Bill Clinton tells crowds, "I'll help you build the middle class back."

What's different this time is how Clinton proposes to accomplish this rebuilding. Mondale's appeal was that of reactionary liberalism: good, unskilled, high-paying union jobs were being lost. The solution was somehow to restore them. Clinton's pitch is state-of-the-art neoliberalism: good, unskilled, high-paying jobs have been lost and they aren't coming back, because in the global marketplace unskilled work will always be performed most cheaply overseas. If Americans want "good jobs," they will have to be *skilled* jobs. In "the new world economy," Clinton likes to say, "what you earn depends on what you can learn." The solution, which follows naturally, is to engage in a massive national training campaign. Improve schools, offer more college loans, require corporations to upgrade their employees' skills, set up apprenticeship programs for the "forgotten half" of the population that doesn't go to college.

Whether or not Clinton wins the presidency, this solution—the Skills Solution—is likely to remain the mainstream Democratic economic vision for a long time. It is the favored approach of virtually all respectable editorial pages, and of prominent Democratic academics such as Lester Thurow and Robert B. Reich (from whom Clinton gets many of his ideas). It's certainly more promising than Mondale's approach, or any vision President Bush has offered. It acknowledges that prosperity requires free international trade, but it also recognizes that in a free trade regime America's "competitive advantage" will depend on its "human capital"—the resources people carry around in their heads. By embracing the skills approach, Democrats effectively address two distinct fears bound up in the issue of "middle-class decline." The first is fear of economic stagnation. There's little doubt a retrained, flexible, Clintonized America would be a more prosperous place. The second fear is of rising economic inequality. In the 1980s the highly skilled left the middle class for loftier ranks, while the unskilled fell to the bottom. But if $5-an-hour burger-flippers can learn computer programming and land $15-an-hour jobs, the middle class should be replenished.

Yet there is something troubling about this eminently responsible, progressive agenda. Not that the government can't help Americans become more productive. Not that a better-trained America might not have a bigger middle class. The trouble has to do with Clinton's vision itself, this idea of a "smart-work, high-wage" economy. Clinton claims that creating such an economy is "the way to save the very soul of our nation." But in several respects, Clinton's ideal America might be an unfamiliar and, to be blunt, uglier place. It's one thing, after all, to have an economy in which the distribution of income is unequal. It's another to have a distribution of income ever more rigorously based on schooling and ability, where the successful can claim not just that they have more money, but that they have something else—knowledge, talent, brains—that sets them apart. What the Skills Solution somewhat smugly ignores is the possibility that greater stratification based on skills—meritocratic stratification—will undermine the traditional American sense of social equality. This may, I think, at least partly explain why voters don't seem to be whipped into a populist fervor by Clinton's talk of "smart work." Populists usually get votes by attacking educated elites, not by proposing to create them.

Sooner or later Democrats like Clinton will have to confront the increasingly nasty social implications of the skills-based meritocracy they now promote. That means exploring not just recent changes in the rate of economic growth and the distribution of income (how *many* people attain affluence) but ongoing changes in the basis of American economic mobility (*how* people attain affluence). Our society has put off this discussion, in part because these have always been very disturbing trends for a democracy to acknowledge. Honest consideration of at least one of them—the possibility of genetic stratification—has been virtually

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taboo for decades. But at some point in the not-so-distant future, the trends will become too evident to ignore. Better for Democrats to begin the discussion now.

Start with the most obvious trend: the growing pay gap between skilled and unskilled labor. The economist Frank Levy, among others, has documented the relative decline in income of those without college degrees. Even among people who attend college, those with more education seem to be making increasingly more money. A recent front-page *New York Times* headline announced a short-term drop in the pay of the college-educated. But Americans with postgraduate education continued to gain ground, even during the current "white-collar recession."

The pay-for-skills trend is the bedrock on which Clinton plans to "rebuild" the middle class. But the trend has an equally obvious, and more disturbing, corollary: the *range* of skills valued by the economy appears to be shrinking, with physical talents worth less, and brain skills worth more. This is an old worry. Kurt Vonnegut's 1952 novel *Player Piano*, for example, depicts a dystopia in which machines have reduced the majority of Americans to such uselessness that they must be kept busy staging parades and filling potholes. Fear of this sort of automation fueled a respectable labor-economics debate when, during World War II, it looked as if the arsenal of democracy could run with much of its work force absent. But after the war, machines didn't put people out of work. Most economists stopped worrying.

Where technology failed, however, international commerce may be succeeding—as Reich (among others) speculates. Even if unskilled physical labor is still technically necessary, free trade now enables it to be performed anywhere in the world. For an American autoworker, a strong back was once a valuable attribute. Increasingly, it's not, as "routine production" jobs (Reich's term) move overseas. Meanwhile, American brainworkers—"symbolic analysts," Reich calls them—are still competitive. They include "lawyers, investment bankers,... research scientists,... writers and editors, musicians, and television and film producers." What becomes of erstwhile American production workers if they lack the necessary skills to be "symbolic analysts"? They are left with the non-intellectual service jobs that can't be shipped overseas. They work as store clerks, waiters, cab drivers, custodians, and security guards. Unfortunately, these service workers don't get paid very well, in part because they must compete against all the other people who, in earlier times, would have been production workers.

Reich's scenario doesn't merely explain the rising relative pay of the skilled. It adds the alarming prospect of an economy in which, to an unprecedented degree, the distribution of money reflects the distribution of brains—the clever on top, the dull below. This was another, largely unspoken, fear underlying the talk of lost "middle-class" jobs in the 1980s. The point wasn't just that unemployed ex-autoworkers were hard up; it was that what they had to offer simply might not be needed anymore. The jobs they were losing were precious because they had defied the connection between middle-class affluence and mental skills. Meanwhile the hated yuppies, with their unpronounceable cheeses and foreign films, were resented not simply because they had money. The problem, as James Fallows argues, was that their "money came from 'intelligent' professional work, by people who'd done well in school."

Unfortunately, Reich's own Skills Solution does nothing to alter the unpleasant implications of the development he identifies. Quite the opposite. Suppose Americans react to the premium paid for brain skills by going out and developing them, making full use of all the college loans, apprenticeship programs, and mandatory corporate expenditures that Democrats like Reich can dream up. If millions of unskilled, low-paid workers do this, America will be richer, its middle class replenished. But those who succeed in the new brain-based order will, more than ever, be tempted to think not just that they have more money than those who remain poor, or even that they have more "skills," but that they are *smarter.*

Three factors compound this divisive tendency. By far the most significant, historically, is the peculiar mechanism America uses to select who gets what sort of brain-training. Fallows, in his recent book *More Like Us*, calls the system Confucianism; another name might be Phony Meritocracy. It attempts to identify in each of us the mysterious presence of "merit," most obviously through the dubious offices of the Educational Testing Service, the organization that administers the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Those thus selected—on the basis of *predicted* success in life—acquire college training and perhaps a professional degree. Only after being sorted on the basis of potential and then anointed with one or two degrees do the "meritorious" confront "the real world."

This system is especially noxious for the American sense of social equality. It selects and labels individuals on the basis of traits that are tested and recorded at an early age. Scores on SATs appear to be used by college gatekeepers as rough proxies for a host of desirable attributes. In this context, who can blame people for treating the tests as if they measure not what cynics say they measure (how well you do on tests), or what they're supposed to measure (how well you'll do in college), but something more, something closer to innate personal worth? Nobody believes this more deeply and guiltily than those who score well on the tests and then learn to scoff at their significance.

This meritocracy is phony, Fallows argues, for several reasons. It measures theoretical potential—"ability"—rather than competence at performing an actual job. It attempts to come up with a general ranking ("yes, you're smart enough to be a doctor and treat anything") when a multiplicity of narrower judgments ("you're dextrous enough to set broken bones") would

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give a more accurate picture. Even this too-broad evaluation typically stops once someone enters a profession. Out of 615,000 American doctors, for example, only 456 lost their licenses in 1990.

Fallows doesn't propose to abolish evaluations and let anyone work as a doctor or air traffic controller. He seeks to replace irrelevant judgments with relevant ones, to supplant Phony Meritocracy with True Meritocracy. He has two models here. One is apprenticeship, where individuals start at the bottom and master progressively more difficult tasks. The other model is sports, where results are too clear-cut for coaches to rely on credentials. Sports, Fallows argues (with some exaggeration), "is the single area of American life in which *performance* matters more than anything else."

A Fallowsian meritocracy would replace our current all-purpose educational credentials with a graduated, open system of more discrete and frequent judgments of a given person's actual performance at a given job. In medicine, for example, sociologist Randall Collins has proposed beginning all medical careers with a position as orderly. Orderlies could then move up the ladder, through various levels of nursing, as they acquired specific competencies and performed well on the job. When necessary, they could go to school to acquire any academic learning necessary to move up to the next level. Eventually they'd qualify as physicians. The point would be to make judgments on the basis most relevant to the tasks that have to be done. Let the doctors be those who are good at diagnosing and healing. Let the lawyers be those who are good at questioning witnesses. Let the hitters be those who get hits and the pitchers be those who get outs. Irving Kristol likes to talk of the "tyranny of the bell-shaped curve," the hard truth that human talents are distributed unequally. But there is no single bell curve of "merit." There are many different curves corresponding to the different skills necessary for human progress. The True Meritocratic idea, in Michael Walzer's phrase, "is that many bells should ring."

Unfortunately, even a radical True Meritocracy would not undo the implications of other long-term changes in the basis of American mobility. Suppose we enacted the Fallows program. We'd have a more freewheeling capitalist society where everyone could take maximum economic advantage of his or her peculiar skills. Yet these skills would exist. The SATs may measure general traits irrelevant to performance in a particular job, but some traits will be relevant. These specific physical, mental, and moral abilities—let's call them "relevant factors," or "R-factors" for short—don't have to be the same for each job. But in each case some people would have them and some wouldn't. Some people would find their abilities were relevant to jobs worth a lot of money. That might encourage feelings of superiority even if abilities were distributed randomly to each new generation. But of course they aren't.

Here we arrive at the disturbing likelihood that many of these traits will be at least in part genetically inherited. In a famous 1971 *Atlantic* article, Harvard psychologist Richard Herrnstein made this point by offering the following syllogism:

1) If differences in mental abilities are inherited, and
2) If success requires those abilities, and
3) If earnings and prestige depend on success,
4) Then social standing (which reflects earnings and prestige) will be based to some extent on inherited differences among people.

There are two strongly held opinions about Herrnstein's thesis. The first is that he is, of course, wrong. The second, privately held by many of the same people who espouse the first view in public, is that he is of course right but we should act as if he's wrong. The taboo on confronting his syllogism is easy to maintain because Herrnstein himself is vulnerable to criticism as a defender of IQ tests who seems to believe not only that they predict who would do best in a broad range of society's "more consequential" jobs, but that they account for who has those jobs now. All this gives his enemies a variety of targets to bombard—so many that it's easy to forget, as his turrets and conning towers are being blown off, that his ship still floats.

Quite simply, you don't have to believe that our current social structure reflects functional wisdom, that IQ tests have predictive value—or even that "mental abilities" are especially valuable—to recognize the ominous implications of inherited talent for social equality. All you have to accept is that there are some traits, the R-factors, that *are* relevant to success in each human endeavor. Because whatever the R-factors are, it is likely that they'll be inherited "to some extent" (to invoke Herrnstein's elastic clause). Sure, discrete, specialized talents might not correlate with success and social standing in the dramatic, straightforward manner that Herrnstein and others claim "IQ" does. But they'll still be heritable, and at least *some* R-factors—verbal facility, for example—are likely to be relevant to a wide variety of jobs. It helps to be articulate, whether you're working at The Gap or teaching comparative literature at Harvard.

It's obvious why Herrnstein's syllogism, rightly, disquiets us. To the extent that differences in R-factors are hereditary, there presumably are limits to meritocratic mobility. We might not be able to discover these limits through testing early in life, but the limits are there all the same. The invidious conclusion that more successful people are in some respects superior people becomes, if not ineluctable, a bit harder to resist. The nerd down the street is a better software writer than you. True, that's only one skill of many—but you can probably *never* be as good at it as he is, no matter how many government-funded apprenticeship programs you join.

Worse, a class system becomes hard to avoid. Sons and daughters of successful people would be genetically more likely to succeed than the sons and daugh-

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ters of unsuccessful people. That might not be such a problem if people married at random. Unfortunately, they tend to marry in their class. Let's call this phenomenon "pairing-off" (the biologists' term is "assortative mating"). Although the trend is still masked in the income statistics, it's obvious to practically everyone that pairing-off has increased in recent decades.

Feminism gets some of the blame. Male lawyers and executives used to marry their secretaries. Male doctors used to marry nurses. True, smart doctors perhaps used to marry smart nurses (who were unable to become doctors themselves). But now that high-paying careers are open to women, the pairing can be accomplished with much greater precision. As Barbara Ehrenreich notes, these days a law partner would be faintly embarrassed to fool around with anyone lower than a junior associate. As Ehrenreich also points out, more than status anxiety prompts this increased pickiness. Today, when most families send two earners into the labor force, it matters a lot how much your spouse makes.

The implications of pairing-off for even a multiple-bell-curve True Meritocracy are pretty grim. Take Fallows's favorite model, sports. Suppose athletics were all our society cared about. The only way you could get rich was through success in sports. But, in keeping with strict Fallowsian principles, society recognized that athletic ability shouldn't be measured and rewarded along a single scale. Instead, each sport selected its major leaguers and champions by True Meritocratic methods. As Fallows argues, this wouldn't be much of a change from current practice. Hundreds of different physical talents (strength, short-distance speed, endurance, coordination, etc.) would be relevant to hundreds of events. Relief pitchers would need a peculiar mix of R-factors; football linemen would need others, skiers still others.

Now add pairing-off—that is, the most successful athletes marry the most successful athletes, the least successful the least successful, etc. "Success" needn't be in the same sport. A champion figure skater might marry an all-American tackle. But despite that randomizing factor, does anyone doubt that after enough generations of pairing, the offspring of the successful athletes would tend to be noticeably more successful than the offspring of the unsuccessful athletes? If that happens with the wide variety of athletic R-factors, why not (to a lesser but still significant extent) with the admittedly wider variety of R-factors that are relevant to economic success?

I'm not saying the Herrnstein Nightmare of fully gene-determined classes is even close to being with us. Most obviously, success in America is now determined by a) luck, b) acts of will, and c) social and environmental influences as well as by inborn talents. Where R-factors are passed on from generation to generation, the "extent" to which that is currently genetic, as opposed to cultural, may be low. To pick the most obvious case, the explanation for relatively low black average achievement is surely not genetic but social. A clear goal of Democrats is to eliminate these gross environmental differences, through education, civil rights laws, and the assimilation of the inner-city underclass. Even success in this attempt to "equalize" environments won't equalize all the non-genetic forces that combine to produce R-factors. Some fathers and mothers (of all races and classes) will still be domineering, some optimistic, some embittered. Some families will split up.

But these weak spots in Herrnstein's syllogism don't disarm it. The trouble isn't that success is now primarily passed genetically from generation to generation—I assume it isn't—but that it's passed genetically from generation to generation *more now than it used to be.* Perversely, recognizing the traditional importance of class and culture is precisely what seems to compel a gloomy answer. Because (and this is Herrnstein's big point) the more we minimize gross environmental differences and eliminate class biases, the less success and failure will be influenced by environment and class, and the more it will be influenced by heredity. Clinton's elaborate training and education programs would, in this sense, be a giant step in the direction of Herrnstein's syllogism. If training is universally available, those who don't make it will increasingly be those who somehow don't have what it takes to develop a skill—usually an intellectual, "symbolic analytic" skill. Some people just aren't smart enough to be computer programmers no matter much they're trained, and at least some aspects of that smart quality are probably inherited. If you offer everyone training, you offer everyone the chance to discover the inherent limits of his or her talent.

It doesn't do any good to respond by pointing, as Fallows does, to the GI Bill, to the story of how farm boys deemed incapable of higher learning went to college and did spectacularly well. Nor does it help to cite the success of the eastern European and southern European immigrants who were once thought to be polluting America's genetic stock. These are wonderful examples of the idiocy of class and race prejudice. They are also examples that seem to confirm Herrnstein's thesis. After all, immigrants and GIs weren't held back by lack of innate ability. They were held back by *anti*-meritocratic social barriers. But now the meritocracy has been busy sucking the best and the brightest out of these pools of talent. Herrnstein suggests, not implausibly, a sort of centrifuge effect. As each new group gets processed by the meritocracy, the most talented tend to rise to the top, the least talented fall to the bottom.

The only reason this isn't obvious, perhaps, is that new groups—Vietnamese, Salvadorans, and other new immigrants, plus previously isolated African Americans—keep getting sucked into the system, which keeps us supplied with heartening examples of upward mobility that defy the notion of a static class structure. Someday, however, we may run out of new groups to run through the centrifuge. At that point, the dramatic suc-

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cess stories will slow to a trickle; the process of genetic stratification will stabilize and clarify.

I don't like this argument, believe me. But it's hard to deny that something along these lines has been at work for decades, if not centuries. Even if the actual Hereditary State is a long way off, and even if it will never be reached, our sense of social equality might suffer if everybody thinks it's the direction in which we're headed. Some unspoken intimation of the Herrnstein scenario surely reinforces what Fallows identifies as the vicious core of yuppie pride—not just, "I'm smarter than you," but also, "My children will be smarter than yours. (So don't expect me to send them to the same school)."

And even if Herrnstein's scenario doesn't apply, there is a more fundamental difficulty with any attempt to defuse the inegalitarian implications of meritocracy. This is the possibility that in *any* money hierarchy—even a flexible, impermanent, True-Meritocratic hierarchy—those on the bottom will feel they somehow deserve to be on the bottom. That's likely to be bad for the nation's sense of equality whether those on the bottom fail due to lack of brains or lack of brawn, due to their genes or their environment. It's bad even if they fail as a result of their own free will—worse, maybe, since then they have nobody to blame.

Here liberals must concede a great nasty irony, long emphasized by conservatives, that might be called the Fairness Trap: the more the economy's implicit judgments are seen as based on true "merit" (and "equal opportunity"), the more those who fail will feel they deserve to fail, the easier it will be to equate economic success with individual worth, and the greater the threat to social equality. If you're offered all the opportunity in the world and *still* can't climb into the middle class, what does that make you? The losers in the subsidized scramble for skills and money will have to face the implication that they are, well, losers.

The picture isn't pleasant. What can liberals do about it? It hardly makes sense to sabotage the meritocracy—to deny Americans opportunities for training and advancement, to preserve arbitrary barriers to success that are themselves violations our notions of equality. Yet the more liberals try to give those on the bottom a "ladder up," the more they accelerate the trends that are giving success itself an invidious meaning. What happens after a few more decades in which the rich get rich—increasingly rich, in Reich's scenario—by exploiting skills and talents that are mainly mental? After a few decades of elaborate training schemes that enable everyone to discover just what skills they have, and don't have? A few more decades of "symbolic analysis" and pairing-off? The conservative writer Charles Murray speculates, not implausibly, about the emergence of a "caste system" in which the smart/rich wall themselves off in separate suburbs and attend separate schools.

Perhaps liberals don't have any way out of this conundrum. Of course, conservatives don't have an answer either (except the expedient of renouncing democratic pretense). And liberals at least have a powerful weapon at their disposal—affirmative government—that they might use to neutralize, or at least inhibit, the divisive implications of the meritocratic trends. Specifically, liberals could use public authority to incubate and spread a countervailing, egalitarian culture. The moral basis of this culture would include a recognition that in any entrepreneurial economy, even one dominated by paired-off symbolic analysts, there will always be an ineradicable element of chance, what George Gilder calls a "resemblance at some level to a lottery." Success will never correspond perfectly to applied talent.

The institutional basis for the egalitarian culture would be an expanded "public sphere" of community life. That sphere could include old institutions, such as the draft, and new ones, such as national service (an idea Clinton, for one, supports). Democrats could easily add a national health care system and a national day care system to the list. These institutions would drive home the moral arbitrariness of capitalist success by the crude expedient of treating all income classes equally, and the more subtle strategy of providing a part of daily living actually enjoyed by various classes on an equal basis. Not everyone can succeed in the private economy. But everyone, even the economy's "losers," would be able to pass the test necessary for equal dignity in this public sphere, which would simply be adherence to society's basic values of work and civility.

The goal would not be to have two contradictory spheres of life, one in which all citizens are equal and one in which the smart/rich lord it over everyone else. The idea, rather, is that the egalitarian culture will have a pervasive influence of the sort to which religions have aspired. The public sphere must be large enough to contain both dramatic economic disparities and the meritocratic trends that are making those disparities increasingly poisonous. In practice, that will be impossible without an end to the de facto segregation, by income class, of residential neighborhoods and public schools. Yet, there is at least the hope that, once the peculiarly threatening urban underclass is assimilated, class-mixing in crude institutions such as national service can set the stage for class-mixing in these more fundamental areas.

Is this a realistic strategy? It was certainly easier to have a sense of equality in a less secular time, when the equal dignity of citizens could be grounded less in the power of the state and more in shared beliefs about the relation of men to God. It was easier when "meritocracy" was mainly a mechanism for overturning old elites rather than entrenching a new ones. Now it's harder. But today's liberals have no choice but to make the attempt. The alternative is to admit, a few decades hence, that the American ideals of upward mobility and social equality were mutually defeating—that our national experiment was in the end a failure. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

After Emigration

Louisa Lane, whose parents were actors, was born in London in 1820 and, after her father's death when she was a small child, was brought to America by her mother, who had found a theatrical engagement here. Louisa had already made her stage debut in England; in 1827, in Philadelphia, she made her American debut as the Duke of York in a production of *Richard III* starring Junius Brutus Booth. She kept on acting, often in classics, often with famous actors, for the rest of her long life.

Her third husband was an Irish comedian named John Drew, by whom she had three children. It was as Mrs. John Drew that she became famous, both as a comedienne (her Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals* was a particular favorite) and as a manager. She ran the Arch Street Theater in Philadelphia for more than thirty years and brought it to high repute. She retired in 1892 and died in 1897.

Louisa Lane Drew's great-great-granddaughter, Drew Barrymore, is now appearing in a film called **Poison Ivy** (New Line). Drew Barrymore was born in 1975 and made her first notable appearance at the age of 7 as the young sister in *E.T.*, in which she charmed. Now 17, she is exactly right for her role in this picture, a high school girl whose attractions unsettle older men. The picture itself is a mechanism similar in structure to the recent *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, except that the mad miscreant in *Cradle* had a recognizable motive: this adolescent is a motiveless malicious sociopath.

What the part asks of Barrymore—sexual maneuvers, insidious vice—she supplies plentifully, but while she was doing it, I thought occasionally of her great-great-grandmother and *her* career. The comparison stings, not because *Poison Ivy* is trash: most English-language plays of the nineteenth century were trash, and Mrs. Drew appeared in a number of them. Nor is it because Mrs. Drew would be shocked past imagining by the sexual candor of the film; she would have been equally shocked by the sexual candor in modern films and plays of high quality. The real point is that the difference between the level of her career and of the career that her descendant is likely to have is less a matter of personal standards than of circumstances, cultural and social. To put it otherwise, if Drew Barrymore had been born in 1875 instead of 1975, she might already have been launched on a career comparable in quality to Mrs. Drew's.

It's an issue that often gets overlooked when we compare work of the past with the present. We admire handwoven baskets and hand-carved ladles in antique shops as if the people who made them had scornfully refused to machine-produce plastic baskets or die-stamp tin ladles. Can anyone seriously doubt that those bygone artisans, so lauded for their purity, would rather have made their products more easily and quickly? Their times didn't offer them the chance.

With artists of the past, an equally sentimental mist clouds our view. Suppose that Trollope, instead of knocking out his daily stint of prose before he left for his post-office chores, had been offered a BBC scripting job that freed him of the post office. Suppose that Mozart, instead of having to scurry after princes and archbishops for commissions, crooking the pregnant hinges of the knee so that thrift might follow fawning, had been offered a chance to write a film score or two that freed him from groveling. Perhaps our exalted view of bygone high integrity ignores a negative factor: the chances to do more lucrative and less demanding work were fewer.

We don't have to be either cynics or apologists for contemporary sleaze to recognize this reality; and nowhere is it more real than in actors' lives. With them, it isn't even a matter of choice. Of all artists, with the possible exception of architects, actors are the most dependent on others for the shapes of their careers, for sheer basic employment. Pianists can play somewhere; dancers can gather a few friends to watch their creations. But actors live most of the time as fulfillers of other people's projects and are at the mercy of what those other people project.

Yes, groups of theater people band together, will always band together, to work as they wish on their own. Solo performers will devise their own shows. But for anything like an acting career in the tradition of admirable acting careers, most actors must, most of the time, rely on their culture and their society to present the chances. That is why when a film talent (and of course it's worse in film) shows the potentialities of an Anjelica Huston or a Debra Winger or a Rebecca de Mornay, we have to hope that they will get opportunities for fulfill-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Casablanca. *Well worth another look on its fiftieth birthday, not least for Bogart's performance and Bergman's beauty. (Reviewed 5/4/92)* **Howards End.** *All arguments that the adaptation of Forster's novel might have been different are washed away by the quality of the acting that the film provides. Well worth more than one viewing. (3/23/92)* **The Last Butterfly.** *By Karel Kachyňa, veteran Czech director, celebrated in Europe, almost unknown here. About a French mime (Tom Courtenay) forced to perform in Theresienstadt. Excellently made, if a touch soggy. Look for it in the Human Rights Watch Film Festival. (6/8/92)* **November Days.** *In the same festival. Marcel Ophuls's probing documentary about the fall of the Berlin Wall. (6/1/92)* **—SK**

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ment—not exactly what one has to hope with painters or poets.

I don't suggest that Barrymore is in the class of these women as yet, only that if her ambition is anything like her ability, she has her work cut out for her. More properly, she doesn't have it cut out for her. Louisa Lane needed only, more or less, to do well in what was available to her in order to become the Mrs. Drew of theater history. It's tougher for Drew Barrymore, and it shows every prospect of getting tougher.

Tom Cruise wears great shirts in **Far and Away** (Universal). He plays an Irish farm lad in 1892, who later immigrates to America, and his shirts look to be made of lovely homespun cloth, cut full. They, like all the clothes, were designed by Joanna Johnston, and they made me wish I had one or two of them.

But except for the shirts, I didn't much envy Cruise. After he has been on screen about eleven seconds, he gets in a terrific fistfight with his two older brothers—for no other reason than that the director wanted to start the role with a fight. In the course of the two hours and eighteen minutes that follow—quite slowly—Cruise gets jabbed deep in the thigh with a pitchfork, gets variously bounced and trounced and embattled. He wins some fights, of course, especially as a boxer in Boston, but not without some clouts about the head that, if they had not been carefully rehearsed, would have felled the proverbial ox. Even a non-proverbial one.

The screenplay by Bob Dolman is like a recipe: a cup of this, a dash of that, a dollop of the other. Cruise and a high-born young Irish woman, Nicole Kidman, are impelled—mostly by Bob Dolman—to leave Ireland together and travel to Boston, where the only vacant room they can find is in a brothel. (Boy, what an idea! Give that Dolman a bonus!) This is all the more titillating because they are not yet lovers—she sleeps on the bed, he on the floor—and they are surrounded by rooms in which so-called daughters of joy ply their trade and their customers.

The whole saga ends, and not an hour too soon, in the Oklahoma Land Rush. Along the way Cruise gets some moments in which to show something of his agreeable talent, including his gift for comedy. Kidman, whose powers are as petty as her features, is uninteresting and unconvincing, whether she's being haughty or naughty. The best elements in the film, which was shot in Super 70—cinematography by Mikael Salomon, direction by Ron Howard—are some close-ups of minor players throughout. Good faces, well lighted, and more truthful than the film they are in. •

Harsh Master

BY DAVID ROSAND

Andrea Mantegna: The Metropolitan Museum of Art catalog edited by Jane Martineau

(Harry N. Abrams, 499 pp., $65, $39.50 paper)

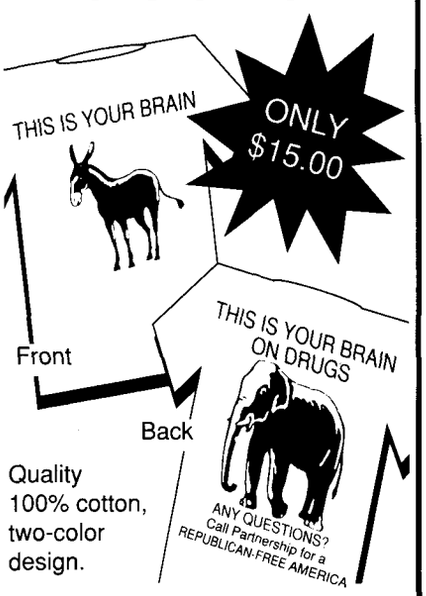
Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative by Jack M. Greenstein

(University of Chicago Press, 301 pp., $37.50)

"Mantegna gives us as many reasons to dislike him as any great artist. He is dry; he is violent; he has a reputation for pedantry." With these words the late Lawrence Gowing began his introductory essay to the catalog of the remarkable Mantegna exhibition that has now come to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) was indeed difficult to like, especially for his fellow artists. He was ill-tempered, arrogant, jealous. And his art has proved equally difficult. It seems puritanical, uncompromising in its intellectual demands, constantly testing the intelligence and commitment of the viewer. It promises little opportunity for aesthetic relaxation or indulgence, few purely sensuous joys.

Mantegna's brand of classicism,

"Okay, one more time..."



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sharp-edged and agitated, leaves us with nothing like the profound visual satisfaction afforded by the mathematical order of Piero della Francesca, whose art is equally, if differently, rigorous and demanding. If, for Renaissance humanism, the purpose of painting, like poetry, was moral instruction through visual pleasure, *docendi cum delectatione*, then Mantegna's hard surfaces can seem rather short on *delectatio*. But the current exhibition at the Metropolitan, which assembles paintings, drawings, and prints by or after Mantegna, should render this obdurate master more accessible to a modern audience, and demonstrate the fuller dimensions of his achievement even as it confirms those values essential to his traditional reputation. What an exhibition of this collected imagery in various media conveys, as no book can, are the real pleasures of Mantegna's classicism, of his particular kind of imagining *all'antica*.

Mantegna received his early training and began his career in Padua, an intellectual center that was renowned for its university and proud of its ancient heritage, which, it was claimed, harked back to its foundation by the Trojan Antenor. Within this notably literate community, ambitious pens were ready to celebrate the accomplishments of an extraordinarily precocious artist; and the first such celebration, a sonnet of 1448, praised the sculpted realism of a painted portrait by the 17-year-old. As the rhetoric of critical appreciation expanded in the second half of the fifteenth century, Mantegna's achievement came to be viewed with a larger cultural vision. Beyond being the unrivaled imitator of nature, he became increasingly the emulator of antiquity, challenging and surpassing the pictorial feats of ancient Greek painters like Zeuxis and Apelles (whose own works were known, significantly, only through the descriptive and anecdotal testimony of writers). The culmination of this panegyric came ten years after Mantegna's death, when he was accorded full mythopoetic recognition in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*: following the obligatory roll call of the great artists of antiquity, his name was coupled with Leonardo da Vinci's to head the galaxy of modern artists who glorify this new age, the Renaissance.

In Padua the young Mantegna was introduced to the advanced culture of his time, especially to the study and the reappropriation of classical antiquity. That commitment—which was furthered by the decade-long presence in Padua of the Florentine Donatello—was to become one fundamental aspect of Mantegna's art, as he mastered the forms of ancient sculpture and architecture and made them his own, transforming those fragmented stones into living pictorial matter. A second, related aspect of his art developed within the resonant field of influence of a remarkable little book: Leon Battista Alberti's *On Painting*, which appeared in 1435, the first humanist treatise on the subject and a manifesto on behalf of painting's status as a liberal, rather than a mechanical, art. Alberti, whom Mantegna came to know personally after his transfer to the court of Mantua in 1460, defined the program for the new art and the new artist of the Renaissance. The three parts of his book articulated the recently invented system of mathematical perspective, indicated the expressive as well as formal relevance of ancient figural models, and defined the painter as a man of culture and of intellectual ambition.

BACCHANAL WITH A WINE VAT, EARLY 1470s

No artist of the following generation so fully realized Alberti's program as Mantegna. As Jack M. Greenstein elegantly argues in an important new book, Mantegna was a particularly "strong reader of Alberti's commentary on painting." In taking the relationship between painter and writer beyond its relatively simple treatment by previous scholars, who were content to trace superficial parallels between Mantegna's images and Alberti's text, Greenstein assigns to Mantegna an active and creative role. Alberti's notion of pictorial narrative or *historia* involved the recognition of the image as a complex signifying structure, and it assumed the viewer's active interpretive responsibility. Preaching visual literacy, Alberti demonstrated that a painting was to be read. And taking such a view as his axiom, Mantegna created a pictorial art of new syntactic complexity. His images transcend any naive mimetic function. They prefer to explore the possibilities of meaning in the tension between the past event and the present narration. His depiction of significant human action requires the active participation of the viewer in the construction of meaning. Mantegna was indeed the thinking artist that Alberti had sought, intellectual but always poetic, going beyond inherited texts and iconographic programs to create his own, fundamentally pictorial structures of meaning. This Mantegna may be encountered on the walls of the exhibition in New York.

Mantegna's classicism was of heroic stamp, essentially in a masculine mode. Despite the humanists' comparisons with the painters of antiquity, Mantegna did not revive the *charis* for which Apelles was famed, that grace that applied equally to the form created and to the process of its creation. Mantegna's is an art of detail, which required a degree of precision and a diligence of application that led to a style lacking in *sprezzatura*, in the nonchalance and apparently effortless execution of the difficult that was to become a critical value in the aesthetic appreciation of the High Renaissance.

Mantegna makes no effort to disguise the difficulty of his art. "Dry, harsh, and sharp" are the terms used by Vasari to characterize the late quattrocento manner in general, but they seem especially applicable to Mantegna. Indeed, we sense that he would have had it no other way. Mantegna was familiar, of course, with the new tonalism that was softening form and embedding it in shadowed atmosphere in the painting of his brother-in-law Giovanni Bellini, and, with even greater force, in that of Leonardo. But while his contemporaries were exploring the luminous possibilities of the oil medium on panel, and developing the smooth transitions that rendered surfaces amiable, Mantegna favored his own technique of distemper

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(a binder of animal glue or casein) on finely woven canvas. Few of these delicate surfaces have come down to us with their colors intact; for the most part, subsequent applications of varnish have put their original chromatic strength beyond recovery, adding a further obstacle to our appreciation of his art.

This technique, in which color tends to sit matte upon the surface, was used by Mantegna for relatively small devotional images. The design of these images also stressed that surface. Figures seen half-length press closely behind and against the surrounding frame; thus impacted, the field acquires the continuous surface effect of bas-relief, with its immediate tactility. Threatening to burst the containing limits of the frame, which marks the conventional barrier between reality and fiction, that same pressure projects these figures forcefully into the world beyond the picture, into our world, thereby implicating us in theirs. This physical insistence, the proximity of the imagined personae to the actual viewer, sustains the intense pathos of these images, and nowhere more so than in our confrontation with the tormented Christ: like his torturers, we come uncomfortably close to that body, and the analogy of position forces upon us an ethical awareness that is impossible to ignore.

VIRGIN AND CHILD, c. 1480-85

The relief effect of Mantegna's pictures is a critical element of his pictorial ideal. No other painter of the Renaissance so consciously and so purposefully tested his art against the rival claims of sculpture. The *paragone*, the relative comparison of the arts, became a favorite intellectual game among the literati and the artists themselves; and if Leonardo most fully articulated in writing the arguments on behalf of painting, Mantegna more openly and graciously welcomed the sister art of the sculptor into his own pictorial representation, in his drawing and engraving as well as in his painting. Resisting the organic curvature of surfaces, accentuating the edges of planes, sharply faceting forms, Mantegna conceived his figures as if they were chiseled from stone. This keen attention to edge led Mantegna to discover new visual truths about contour, about its spatial complexity and the charged role of reflection in its definition—and those discoveries played an especially important part in his achievement as a printmaker.

In a more explicit invitation to consider the two arts, Mantegna juxtaposed living figures and stone fragments, most famously in representations of the martyred St. Sebastian (none of which appears in this show). In two of these images a sculpted sandaled foot, the marble remains of pagan antiquity, is poignantly set beside the living foot of the saint, the mortal flesh of the Christian who will triumph over death. Figuring the historical succession, the painted martyr stands tall against a classical column, part of the ruins of the old order; that is, the Christian saint replaces the sculpted pagan god or hero, his own figure reconstituted from the surviving module of the foot: *ex pede Herculem*. Thus, from the broken bits and pieces of ancient culture, the prizes of antiquarian collectors, Mantegna created images of Christian fulfillment. The painter's religious vision is always inspired by the archaeologist's loving attention to the *disjecta membra* of a distant past that powerfully animates the present.

Mantegna's debate with sculpture became most open in a series of monochrome paintings that brazenly masquerade as modeled relief, figures set against richly veined marble surfaces or presenting themselves as gilded bronze. And a conceit of a different kind informs the background landscapes of many of Mantegna's pictures: these contain caves and quarries in which stone is being cut and dressed, or carved into sculpture. Nature, for this painter, is a crafted world, very much the creation of a *deus artifex*, and nature itself seeks to emulate its artistic creator, as clouds and rocks form themselves into images—human heads, horsemen. By turning nature into a sculptor, painting represents its own triumph.

His contemporaries praised Mantegna as a great draftsman or designer (*disegnatore*) and as an inventor (*inventore*). The latter term, which was central to Alberti's program for the new artist of the Renaissance, involved the full range of the artist's mind and imagination, his *ingegno* and his *fantasia*. To invent—to discover something new, never before imagined—had been the high task of poets since antiquity. The quattrocento painters made it their own, and no one more than Mantegna. Whatever his relation to the humanists, to the antiquarians and the literati, Mantegna very clearly established his own intellectual credentials. Although he could work creatively (and not without a touch of irony and humor) with assigned allegorical programs of deadpan seriousness and unpromising complexity—most notably in *Pallas Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*, a painting for young Isabella d'Este's *studiolo*, which climaxes the installation at the Metropolitan—he was, much more impressively, the creator of his own inventions *all'antica*. No mere archaeological draftsman recording the remains of antiquity, Mantegna sought to reinvent that visual past, to give it new life through his brush, his pen, and, most importantly, his burin.

Perhaps Mantegna's most unique achievement, and still his most problematic one, lay in printmaking. He was the first Italian painter of real stature to explore engraving as a means of dissem-

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inating pictorial ideas. Relatively few such prints have been attributed to him directly, that is, as the actual engraver handling the burin. That handful of prints, however, includes some of the most influential designs of the Renaissance, such as the paired plates of a *Bacchanal* and of a *Battle of Sea Gods.* Presented as a frieze of figures in the mode of relief sculpture, each of these compositions summons classical antiquity to renewed life in both form and content.

And other engravings offer religious subjects of particular pathos. In the *Entombment of Christ* or the *Virgin and Child,* for example, human feeling is studied with a controlled dispassion that succeeds in heightening passion. Lamentation over the deceased is sounded by the profiled cry of St. John, who stands isolated as leader of the lamenting chorus; his piercing note is echoed in the grieving masks of the other mourners, and given final punctuation in the extreme gestures of the distraught Mary Magdalene. In the more concentrated drama of the *Virgin and Child,* dreadful maternal foreknowledge expresses itself in the tender overprotection of the child, the forced intimacy of pressed cheeks that bespeaks emotion of discomforting urgency. Inspired by the example of Donatello, Mantegna here revived an older Byzantine type, the Madonna of Sweet Embrace, that had already epitomized the terrible human paradox of the Mother of God, transferring the maternal compassion over the body of the dead man back to the living infant. Like his revival of the pagan,Mantegna's plumbing of the human tragedy of Christian myth was an essential aspect of his inventiveness.

Such printed images were never intended for worship. Their function was different. They were an invitation not to pious devotion, but to aesthetic contemplation. These engravings present the art of Mantegna as *inventore,* the inventive creator of pictorial ideas, but also as *disegnatore,* the skilled draftsman capable of giving idea visible form. Contemporaneously with the great German masters such as Martin Schongauer, Mantegna turned engraving from a new technology into a new art form, a form that spread the fame of the artist across all of Europe, as attested by the young Dürer's copies of the Italian's pagan images.

Unlike Schongauer and Dürer, however, Mantegna never signed his printed work; presumably, one recognized the style of the artist even without such documentation. As a result of this authorial reluctance, however, the issue of attribution remains the most challenging one of all in the art of Mantegna. Scholars continue to debate whether Mantegna actually engraved his own plates or commissioned professionals of the burin to inscribe his drawn designs. Interestingly, this exhibition presents the issue as unresolved. The two curators responsible for this material each contribute an essay to the catalog. David Landau, editor of *The Print Quarterly* and chairman of the exhibition steering committee, calls his essay "Mantegna as Printmaker." Suzanne Boorsch, curator of prints at the Metropolitan Museum, calls hers "Mantegna and His Printmakers." For Landau, Mantegna is one of the genuine pioneers of engraving, an inventor and explorer of new and varied techniques. For Boorsch, the great painter, lacking training in the handling of the goldsmith's tools and hardly with the time to devote to the laborious task of engraving, must have turned to professionals for help. With analytic precision Boorsch clarifies the situation of the Mantegna "school," and persuasively distinguishes the hands of individual engravers and resolves some of the problems that have dogged print connoisseurs seeking to make sense of the alphabet of monograms and signatures inscribed on prints after Mantegna designs.

For a resolution of the big question, however, the proof is hanging on the walls of this exhibition. Encouraged to look more closely at the core of prints that have been assigned to Mantegna himself since the sixteenth century (Landau adds a few more), we are struck by a new wealth of graphic creativity. Underscoring the fact that Mantegna lacked proper training in incising designs on metal, Landau observes the extensive use of drypoint, alone and in combination with engraving. This technique, which involves scratching into the metal with a sharp point, sends off a burr to either side of the line that in turn spreads the ink beyond the actual contours of the line itself, creating a tonal halo along its length. Drypoint, then, becomes a major factor in the richness that has always been appreciated in the finest impressions of Mantegna prints.

Mantegna's instinct was evidently to draw on the plate rather than to engrave. The great variety and the sheer complexity of his lines, which already distinguish them from any other engraver's, may record the work of an ambitious amateur, pushing the medium beyond its accepted limits; but in this instance inexperience proved to be a source of graphic invention. Mantegna's lines seem the result of a sequence of gestures, a single contour the product of repeated short stabs of the burin rather than one long *taille,* or they seem simultaneously too wide and too shallow for standard burin work. He appears to have wielded the burin rather like a pen, to have drawn the instrument across the surface, scratching rather than incising, varying the line by shifting the angle of application. In their intention and in their effect, these lines are so similar to the taut, wiry lines of Mantegna's pen drawings that one must assume that they were engraved by an artist of great daring and genius, and by an engraver profoundly responsive to the most intimate qualities of Mantegna's own drawing style and possessing the technical virtuosity capable of translating that perception into its linear equivalent on the plate—which is to say, one must assume the hand of Mantegna himself.

Next to the *Virgin and Child,* shown here in its best known impression (from the Albertina in Vienna), the curators have hung a print that was inspired by it more than a century and a half later: Rembrandt's *Virgin and Child with a Cat.* Beyond confirming the historical traditions of printmaking, the continuities and the direct discourse between studios over time, this comparison with the greatest master of etching and drypoint also calls attention to other novel aspects of Mantegna's graphic art. The rich tonal effect of the Vienna impression of the *Virgin and Child* results not only from the fine intermeshing of drypoint among the engraved hatching patterns; it is the product also of careful and deliberate printing. A film of ink was purposely left on the plate, producing an overall grayish tone. This is just the kind of creative inking that we have come to expect of Rembrandt. The discovery that Mantegna seems to have experimented with it so early in the history of the art only confirms his stature as an inventive pioneer of printmaking, the medium par excellence of painters possessed of extraordinary *fantasia*—whose heads, as Dürer was to put it in an inelegant but striking image, are "filled with figures."

DAVID ROSAND teaches art history at Columbia University and is currently completing *On Drawing: Critical and Historical Studies.*

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The Original Outsider

By Sean Wilentz

The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 by Charles Sellers

(Oxford University Press, 502 pp., $35)

In July 1832 President Andrew Jackson vetoed a bill to recharter the Second Bank of the United States and touched off a long and ferocious struggle over the politics of American finance. It was a formative historical moment. For Jackson, the bank was a monster, a privately owned instrument of "the rich and powerful" to "bend ... government to their selfish purposes" at the expense of "the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers." For Jackson's numerous enemies, killing the bank raised the specter of violent revolution. "A manifesto of anarchy," the BUS president Nicholas Biddle called the veto message, "such as Marat or Robespierre might have issued to the mob at the faubourgh [sic] St. Antoine."

The ensuing bank war rallied Jackson's political coalition, guaranteed his re-election, and secured his legend as a populist hero. But was the president's onslaught, and the larger movement that supported it, really all that Jackson claimed and Biddle feared? Did Jacksonian politics really pit the humble and the weak against the rich and the powerful? Or were those sansculottish shapes only mirages, products of the notoriously hyperactive, self-deluding American political imagination? If so, what was all the excitement really about?

These questions are important, given Jacksonianism's hallowed position in the history of American democratic development. They are all the more so in the light of contemporary politics, where image-makers of every persuasion seem determined to claim the Jacksonians' populist mantle. With Jerry Brown, Bill Clinton, *and* George Bush, not to mention Ross Perot, all running as outsiders, true men of the people, it is time again to take historical stock of the whole phenomenon.

Over the past forty years, most academic historians have tried to deflate the Jacksonians' populist reputation. After the publication of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s admiring *The Age of Jackson* in 1945, a generation of dissenting scholars described the Jacksonians not as oppressed workers and farmers, but as men on the make, as liberal capitalists out to widen their economic opportunities and to elevate their social status while seducing the voters with populist claptrap. In the 1960s and 1970s the historiographical emphasis shifted to matters of race and conquest, with the Jacksonians portrayed as the determined defenders of slavery and the vengeful exterminators of American Indians. The Whig Party, once vilified as the seat of un-American privilege and capitalist greed, began to look better and better, as a party of controlled economic growth, moral reform, and (at least compared with the Democrats) a modicum of racial toleration.

Jackson and his allies have still attracted defenders over the years, above all in Jackson's biographer Robert V. Remini. By the end of the 1980s, however, in the wake of our new insistence on writing about race and gender as matrices of American power, the Jacksonians' standing in the liberal academy hit an all-time low. Whereas Schlesinger once lionized Jacksonian democracy as the forerunner of the New Deal, contemporary historians are just as likely to link Jacksonianism to the cruder forms of Sunbelt, right-wing reaction.

Charles Sellers's ambitious survey breaks with this trend and reworks the Jacksonians' image as genuine democrats. The book is not a hagiography. Sellers (best known until now as the biographer of James K. Polk) makes no excuses for those aspects of Jacksonian democracy that appall modern readers, especially its raucous sloganeering about white supremacy. Sellers's Jacksonians, unlike Schlesinger's, are tortured by racial and patriarchal contradictions that belie their equal rights rhetoric. (Sellers takes special pains to condemn this hypocrisy, and the horror of Jackson's Indian policy.) But the main thrust of the Jacksonians, Sellers insists, was not anti-black or anti-Indian or anti-female, it was anti-capitalist. This was a movement, he argues, aimed against the nation's privileged monied interests, against the profound economic transformations of the early nineteenth century. To support his case, Sellers undertakes a sweeping synthesis of recent work in social history and combines it with a fresh political narrative. It is a brave, magisterial effort to rewrite the era's history—learned and rewarding, though sometimes maddeningly dense and schematic.

Sellers's organizing theme, the market revolution, derives from a continuing debate (largely unknown outside the universities) over the early history of American capitalism. The subject may baffle readers raised on the conventional wisdom about the economic history of the United States, which holds that capitalism arrived on the first ships of white settlers to these shores. Without denying the presence of capitalist enterprise, numerous social historians have been questioning how fully America, as late as 1860, could be described as a capitalist society. Southern historians led the way in their interpretations of the "pre-bourgeois" character of plantation life and the limited market attachment of the white yeomanry. More recently, scholarship on the colonial and early national rural North has uncovered a subsistence world largely governed not by profit-oriented market individualism, but by family inheritance, barter exchange, and household production.

These debates have hardly produced a consensus. (Even the revisionists disagree on key issues.) Increasingly, however, historians have treated early American development not in terms of the unleashing of a pre-existing capitalist economy, but in terms of a transition *to* capitalism. And this has implications that cut to the core of our political history. For if the United States was not a capitalist society from the start, then what becomes of the widespread assumption that capitalism and democracy have always been twins? Were democratization and the transition to capitalism mutually reinforcing? Or did democratization evolve primarily in order to check capitalist growth?

Sellers holds to the latter view, which he presents as an attack on what he calls the historiography of American consensus. From 1815 on, he argues, seaboard capitalists relentlessly assaulted the subsistence-based majority of the interior. They did this by opening up new lines of transportation and communication, and by pulling the backcountry into a web of debt and dependency. In the burgeoning northern and western cities, entrepreneurs debased old artisan skills and created a new working class of men and women wholly reliant

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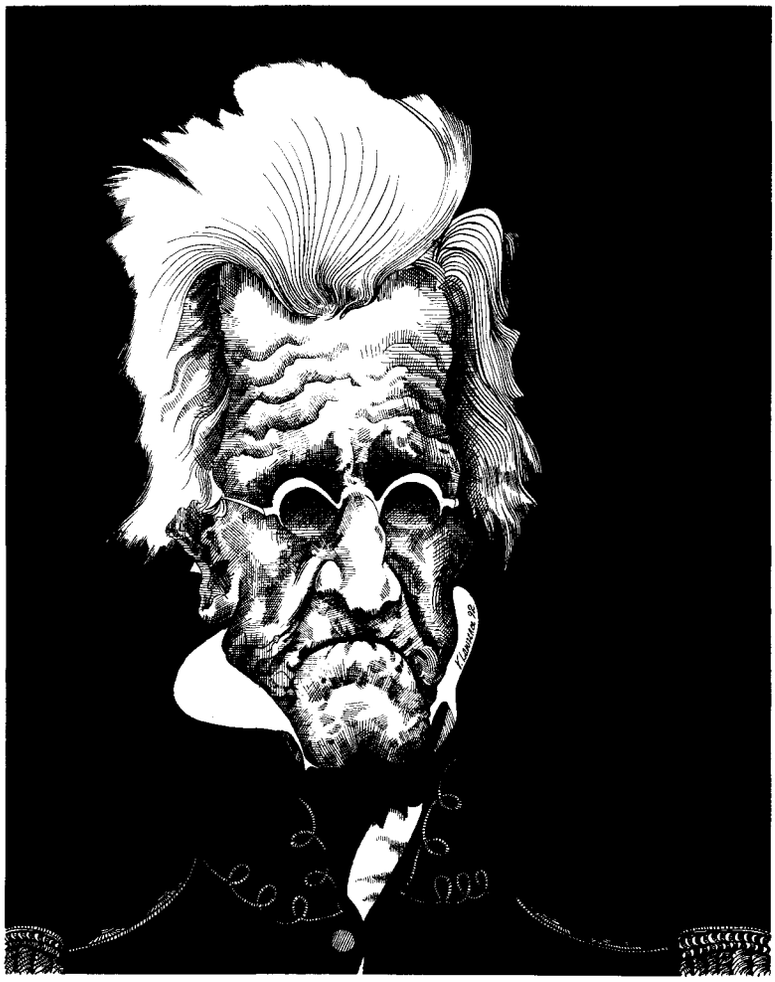
on the caprices of the wage-labor market. The cotton capitalists of the plantations—Sellers flatly rejects the idea that the Old South was pre-bourgeois—built fortunes from the sweat of black slaves and lorded it over their poorer white neighbors. Beset by problems of their own, above all by a rising population that put pressure on the inheritance of land, large portions of the subsistence majority found themselves waging a losing battle against the encroachments of the impersonal cash market. Their old communal connections seemed undone, their dreams of personal independence seemed dashed.

Influenced by the Marxist scholarship of E. P. Thompson, Sellers interprets the market revolution as a cultural transformation as well as an economic one. More than a means of self-support, he asserts, the household subsistence economy was a way of life, tied together by kinship, a rough equality among different households, and an ethic of neighborly cooperation. Repelled by the cultural imperatives of the market (including the rationalist Arminian religion of the seaboard elites), the backcountry took spiritual refuge in what Sellers calls a series of emotive, antinomian religious revivals. A Kulturkampf ensued between "the magical spirituality of a parochial and fatalist countryside" and "the self-reliant effort of a cosmopolitan and activist market." From that struggle—and from the market's triumph in it—would arise the shapes of nineteenth-century American bourgeois civilization, with its doctrines of sexual restraint, contractual individualism, and material accumulation as the main measure of human progress.

The argument is not always easy to follow. In trying to impose order on his unruly materials, Sellers resorts to code words, which he crams into sentences that read like Delphic riddles. ("While collective repression pushed bourgeois hegemony across the North, antinomian democracy—and racist slavery—empowered the Hero of New Orleans to bring Kulturkampf to a showdown in national politics.") Nor does Sellers avoid certain interpretive traps. His romanticized contrasts between the "altruistic" backcountry and the "egoistic" market are overdrawn. His combative imagery of the aggressive market slights the number of small producers, especially in the North, who eagerly seized commercial opportunities. The cultural differences among his anti-market democrats—especially between the rationalist, urban democracy and the pious, constricted backcountry—become blurred. (So do the appropriations by some Jacksonians of the writings of Adam Smith, Thomas Paine, and other commercial advocates.) When he isn't careful, Sellers slips into describing the rising middle class as the sinister and calculating string-puller behind various reform and political movements. And the book's efforts to soften some of the glaring differences between the political economies of the North and the South are equally unpersuasive.



ANDREW JACKSON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Still, Sellers's basic points ring true. The new markets in land, labor, and produce were hardly the egalitarian mechanisms that their champions portrayed. For many small farmers and craftsmen, entering commercial production was initially a means to raise enough cash to pay off taxes and buy land for their children, and thus preserve their modest patrimonies. Others (especially urban artisans) expected that an acceleration of trade would benefit the great masses of free producers by loosening old clientage networks and widening the sphere of individual prosperity.

Instead, as Sellers contends, "the generation of 1820 and its children experienced American history's sharpest rise in the 'permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy' feared by Alexis de Tocqueville." Per capita national product among non-slaves rose dramatically—but a relatively few families of established wealth gobbled up by far the largest share of the increase. New institutions of monied men—banks, corporations—secured public charters for purely private ends; the courts redefined corporation and property laws to aid these new enterprises, deepening the disparities of power and prestige. For untold numbers of dependent Americans—tramping city journeymen, sweatshop seamstresses, debt-ridden farmers, and marginal squatters (to say nothing of expropriated Indians and Southern slaves)—the higher realities of the market revolution belied the glittering images of mass prosperity. Their prospects only worsened with the recurrent booms and busts of an increasingly volatile and speculative business cycle.

The widening gap between an imagined Jeffersonian democratic commerce and what the world would eventually learn to call capitalism quickly affected politics. Ordinary Americans, after all, had fought a revolution that was supposed to have torn up the old aristocratic link between political privilege and economic power. In the Constitution (as amended by the Bill of Rights) they had ratified a federal design and a formally classless state of independent white male citizens. When, in the 1790s, the High Federalists around Alexander Hamilton seemed on the verge of creat-

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ing the lineaments of an American ruling class, a national political alliance of planters and plebeians flushed them out of office.

Yet steadily, as a new generation of self-described nationalist republicans assumed power after 1815, neo-Hamiltonian elitism and corruption seemed to be everywhere. Democratic commerce and productive enterprise receded before a recurring mania for speculation and paper profits, driven by monied men with political connections. When the crashes came, as inevitably they did, those with the best connections covered their assets and left lesser men in ruins. From atop Monticello, which was itself encumbered in debt, the aging Thomas Jefferson warned in 1819 of "a general demoralization of the nation, a filching from industry of its honest earnings, wherewith to build up palaces, and raise gambling stock for swindlers and shavers, who are to close their careers of piracies by fraudulent bankruptcies."

Other aggrieved Americans, viewing politics as the source of all social and economic disorder, naturally looked to politics for a solution. Over the next decade and a half, disparate strands of discontent would unite around Andrew Jackson: Northern artisans, immigrant day laborers, and yeoman farmers, along with slaveholders fearful that neo-Federalist Yankees were trying to restrict slavery's spread.

Sellers is at his best when he relates these political turns and details their social origins. Rehearsing the standard set pieces of the period—the Missouri debates, the panic of 1819, the bank war, the nullification crisis—he gets to the heart of complicated issues and connects seemingly random debates to the larger impact of the market revolution. Instead of boiling his story down to two clunking monoliths, the Democrats and the Whigs, he captures the swirl of competing interests, factions, and rivalries that constituted Jacksonian politics. Moving outside the confines of national party infighting, he adroitly shows how local conflicts and changes in the basic political context—the expansion of white male suffrage, the very invention of modern political parties—arose from the social strains of the 1820s and 1830s.

And Sellers is, as ever, a gifted biographer. He advances his social and political themes with powerful sketches of some of the main protagonists. At a time when some social historians are denigrating the importance of "great white men" (indeed, the importance of individuals) as a reactionary con game, Sellers nourishes an older tradition of radical history-writing, attentive to seemingly impersonal forces but also alert to how personality, leadership abilities, and sheer chance affect historical outcomes. He is particularly effective in restoring Jackson to the center of the era's history.

Jackson, according to Sellers, was an inflated patriarch, "superbly shaped by experience and temperament to appeal to the country's common folk." Born to a pious Presbyterian clan in the plebeian Scots-Irish Carolina backwoods, his traumatic boyhood during the Revolution left him orphaned young; it also stamped him with the cult of manly honor and an undying hatred of the British Empire and of American Indians. Adrift, he studied the law and worked his way west to what would become Tennessee. He enjoyed some early political success, but his true calling was military. His ruthless attacks on Indian tribes and his victory over the British at New Orleans in 1815 made him a national celebrity. A self-made man with a trip-wire temper, Jackson warred often with numerous foes, and it was nearly always war to the knife. He eventually learned to guide his anxieties and rage toward what he thought of as the honorable role of the great protector—of white women and children, of his soldiers, and eventually of the vast productive majority of the American citizenry.

Amid the economic turmoil of the 1820s, this Tennessee caudillo re-entered politics and emerged as something of a democratic champion of the producing classes. Years earlier, Jackson had nearly lost his shirt in some land speculations and related business deals, and the experience left him with a permanent hatred of debt, banks, and the paper money credit system. Witnessing the hardships sparked by the panic of 1819, he broke with many of his gentry friends and supporters to uphold justice for indebted farmers. Denied the presidency in 1824 because of what he sincerely believed was a shady, last-minute backroom bargain, Jackson became convinced that the people's will and welfare were being thwarted by an interlocking network of bankers and corrupt politicians. After finally gaining the White House in 1828, he arrived in Washington prepared to cleanse the republican temple.

As Sellers shows, Jackson's presidency was a coherent effort to rid government of class biases, to vindicate the principle that "the majority is to govern," to dismantle the top-down, credit-driven motors of the market revolution. Jackson himself forced the issues when his more timid allies urged caution. Although a far cry from Jacobin revolutionism, his actions augured a wrenching shift. Government-sponsored internal improvements fell into disfavor, on the grounds that they violated states' rights and favored the wealthy. A policy of rotation in office aimed to dissolve entrenched elitism.

To assist hard-pressed farmers and planters, Jackson backed Indian removal, cheap land prices, and settlers' pre-emption rights. When South Carolinians (led by Jackson's erstwhile and uneasy ally Calhoun) defied federal authority by nullifying a tariff law, the president threatened to use force, defending his bedrock majoritarian nationalism to the limits of his powers. On other fronts, Jackson called for widened democratic reforms, including direct election of senators, judges, and the president, and the right of voters to instruct their congressmen.

Above it all loomed the bank war, and Jackson's subsequent pursuit of a hard money policy—a monumental effort to remove the hands of a few unelected private bankers from the levers of the nation's economy and restore a more democratic commerce of small producers. Founded in the aftermath of the War of 1812, the Second Bank of the United States served, in effect, as a national clearinghouse and regulatory agent for the hundreds of private commercial banks that issued paper notes. By promoting a stable currency, it greatly enhanced the reputation of banks in general, while providing them

Turtle

Who would be a turtle who could help it?
A barely-mobile hard roll, a four-oared helmet,
she can ill afford the chances she must take
in rowing toward the grasses that she eats.
Her track is graceless, like dragging
a packing-case places, and almost any slope
defeats her modest hopes. Even being practical,
she's often stuck up to the axle on her way
to something edible. With everything optimal,
she skirts the ditch which would convert
her shell into a serving dish. She lives
below luck-level, never imagining some lottery
will change her load of pottery to wings.
Her only levity is patience,
the sport of truly chastened things.

KAY RYAN

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with a national reserve of capital.

For Jackson and his supporters, however, such a huge concentration of economic power outside the control of the federal government (which actually supplied one-fifth of the bank's reserves) amounted to a clear-cut repudiation of democracy. The bank was a spreading aristocratic sore upon an otherwise healthy political body. By refusing its recharter and then removing the federal deposits, the Jacksonians thought that they could begin to break artificial capitalist power. Successful in their battle with the BUS, Jackson and his successor, Martin Van Buren, then gravitated toward federal efforts to curb speculation by curtailing paper emissions, and by placing the economy on what they considered an honest hard money foundation.

There were ironies here, as well as a certain hopelessness. Lashing out at the Second Bank of the United States could hardly, in itself, undo a market revolution that had already transformed the American economy. Indeed, once Jackson followed up with his all-out currency reforms, he alienated important elements within his own party who, whatever their complaints about the BUS, never wanted to see the entire paper system destroyed. A calamitous financial panic in 1837 was easily (if, as Sellers claims, unfairly) blamed on Jackson's reforms. Van Buren's subsequent moves toward even more restrictive money policies did nothing to relieve the devastation. In its wake, wealthy Southern planters, who were always suspicious of Jackson's more democratic leanings, joined businessmen, farmers, and skilled workers from the more commercial regions of the country in a Whig counterrevolt that swept Van Buren from office. Thereafter, Sellers claims, the Democratic Party gradually accommodated itself to the forces of capitalist innovation and inequality, much as the conservative Whigs learned to drop their anti-democratic animus and to campaign as down-home friends of the people.

The Jacksonians left an indelible mark on American politics, by smashing durable forms of political deference, by opening the system as never before to men of humble backgrounds, and by addressing anew the institutional bases of economic and political privilege. After 1840 those impulses certainly began to fade as the democracy was wracked by internal dissension. Aspects of the Jacksonian politics of equal rights survived through the rest of the nineteenth century, but mainly outside the Democratic Party, or in insurgent elements within it—in a host of democratic movements that would eventuate in the populist revolts of the 1880s and 1890s.

But the crackup of Jacksonianism had less to do with any accommodation to capitalism than with its inability to confront the issues of slavery and race. Those were the issues, of course, that in the 1840s and 1850s were propelling the nation toward civil war. From its inception, however, the political success of the Jacksonians was predicated on an intersectional agreement to banish from national politics all debates connected to slavery. Portions of the party were strongly pro-slavery; generally, the Jacksonians' conceptions of democratic commerce fully tolerated the Southern traffic in black men, women, and children.

Once Jacksonian-inspired westward expansion and Manifest Destiny drew these issues squarely into the center of public life, in the arguments over slavery in the territories, the Democratic coalition fractured. So did its ideology of white male equality—which Northern Jacksonians (fearing slavery and loathing blacks) turned into a battle cry for free soil, and which their Southern counterparts (loathing blacks and fearing Yankees) turned into a defense of their own peculiar way of life. Although party stalwarts managed for a time to piece together a semblance of unity, Jacksonian democracy died long before the guns sounded at Fort Sumter.

To be sure, elements of the Jacksonian creed retained some pertinence in the sectional crisis. Jackson's democratic nationalism almost certainly would not have tolerated Southern secession. (Over the excruciating winter of 1860-61, not a few Yankee Republicans pined for but a single hour of the late Old Hickory, imagining he would have nipped treason in the bud, as he had during the nullification controversy.) Fundamentally, however, Jacksonianism's hatred of the money power was politically (not to mention morally) defective when it came to racial subjugation and bondage. And here lay the ultimate paradox of Jacksonianism: the same expansive democracy that it so fervently proclaimed eventually undermined all efforts to suppress the slavery question, thereby sundering the party.

In view of this record, and all that followed, it is no wonder that the Jacksonians' reputation suffered. The most prominent national leader who survived the Civil War with his Jacksonian principles more or less intact was President Andrew Johnson, driven by the Negrophobia and class insecurities that made him a disastrous successor to Abraham Lincoln. To modern ears, the Jacksonians' admixture of hero worship, laissez-faire, and racialism sometimes has an alarming timbre, born of accumulated resentments and lurid fears. It can sound like a stammering, archaic fury at modernity. Some of the Jacksonians' social presumptions seem to share common ground with those more recent insular fixations that despise racial outsiders—blacks, Indians, Jews, whomever. Jacksonianism, in short, looks all too easily like the democracy of fools. And the mythology of the plainspoken, unterrified patriarchal leader has apparently passed from the planter Jackson to wealthy, "self-made," corporation-friendly cowboys like Reagan and Perot—or even, some would argue, into darker, Dukean currents of our political life.

Yet such historical conflations finally are facile. They overlook the extent to which the Jacksonians and their irascible general were of another age. They overlook how it was that, in the 1820s and '30s, the rhetoric of small-producer equality still had credibility. Above all, they overlook what the Jacksonians

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themselves thought they were trying to achieve. Retrieving the social history of the market revolution and connecting it to the traditional concerns of political historians leads to very different conclusions.

Contrary to some consensus scholars, Jacksonian democracy was no pseudo-populism, engineered by jaded, hypocritical opportunists united by their cupidity (although as ever in politics, there were plenty enough of such characters at every level, from the national leadership to the lowliest ward captains). Its chief distinguishing characteristic was not its appeal to tribal antipathies. (Whigs, particularly in the South, were no slackers when it came to playing the race card, while anti-immigrant nativism was mainly a Whig disorder.) Jacksonianism arose primarily out of a strong and quite reasonable apprehension that new classes of monied men were rising to positions of exclusive power, with no public accountability whatsoever, to corrupt American independence and equality. Jacksonians believed, with the New Yorker Benjamin Butler, that a "fatal doctrine" had overtaken the country, "that the interests of trade and other pecuniary interests are the highest interests of the nation—that nothing is to be esteemed so valuable as money and that profit-profit-profit is the 'be all and the end all' of the social state!" They beheld the rise of what they called America's "associated wealth" not as a vindication of equal rights, but as its opposite.

To view the Jacksonians this way, to view them approximately as they viewed themselves, is not to dismiss their brutal dimensions. But it is to insist on reading the Jacksonian era as Melville read it, as tragedy and not as melodrama. And it is to check the now-fashionable, sentimental assumption that capitalism—more precisely, commerce commanded by capitalists—has been the eternal ally of the democratic rights of man. With all its pathos, the story of the rise and fall of Jacksonianism reminds us, and the rest of the world, of the classically American challenge, which is to sustain and to enlarge democracy in the midst of manifest political inequalities between the monied few and the producing, dependent many.

SEAN WILENTZ is professor of history at Princeton University.

Sons and Fathers

BY MICHAEL LEVENSON

Ever After
by Graham Swift

(Knopf, 276 pp., $21)

How could any comment more sharply irritate Graham Swift than the cruelly recurrent, dully obvious opinion that neither his two novels written before *Waterland* (1983) nor the two written since even belong on the same shelf as that strong book? But so it is. Swift is only 42—only, let us say, halfway there—and, smart and conscious as he is, he must sometimes face the thought that his career is building to a point where it will either recede into the plodding of the minor novelist or leap again into the upper air while all our craning necks turn to follow.

The publication of *Waterland* sent out a gusty wind of respect on which Swift can still be seen floating. Here in the United States his first two books were belatedly issued, and the sudden focusing of the camera eye in 1985 gave the impression of a steep upward curve of the writing talent, the arrival of the latest young Dickens. In certain quarters Swift was named a "major novelist," one who "may prove to be the most outstanding English novelist of the final quarter of the twentieth century." But two bland books later the curve no longer seems to be rising, and *Waterland* begins to look less like the gateway to literary paradise and more like a wondrous freak. Now, with his new novel *Ever After*, with the film of *Waterland* set to arrive later this year, and with the imminent republication of the earlier novels, Swift enjoys a second moment under the glass.

To read his five novels all together is to see the ordeal of fiction, and to remember the dignity of those who submit to its afflictions. Behind the lives of the characters in *Ever After*, you can often hear the wheezing of the determined author: it looks as though it doesn't come easy nowadays to Swift, this novel writing—the contriving of situations, the painting of emotions, the choosing of names, the manufacture of sentences, all the apparatus of fiction. Do you think this makes Swift less admirable, less worthy? Quite the contrary. He is a figure to learn from, the hard-working novelist with one significant success (which may never be repeated, and so what?), the professional in the imagination business who delivers his goods every few years, who raises no boasty thumbs in praise of his own talents but who doggedly composes 200 pages of serious story, without pandering either to those who write the reviews or to those who write the checks.

Something else is taught by an encounter with the complete works of Graham Swift: the persistence of a compulsion, a compulsion to invent, again and again, a certain plot. Call it the plot of the Weak Son, the plot that returns through each of the novels and burrows beneath their surface variations. It goes like this. A man living in the present knows himself to be ineffectual and talentless. He is scarcely able to conduct decent human relations, and sees his life as determined by stronger forces that have placed him where he is, that have made him what he is. He may own a shop (*The Sweet-Shop Owner*, 1980); he may work in a government office (*Shuttlecock*, 1981); he may manage his wife's glittering stage career (*Ever After*), but wherever he works and whomever he loves, he endures the perception of his impotence—of not living up to the past, of being little, being vague, being small potatoes, not much good at anything. *Ever After* is the story of one Bill Unwin—"un-win" as in "lose," "fail," "surrender."

The Weak Son has a father, heavy with paternity, not clearly distinct from the fatherland he often serves in military garb. This Big Pop stands like a monolith casting long shadows. He is wealthy or famous or arrogant, or all three, and wherever he goes, he brings the close aroma of domination. The Son often has a wife and child of his own, with whom he has disastrously ill-tuned relations, and it is always clear that his rickety, unsubstantial life will only improve when the father gets out of the way.

In the early *Shuttlecock*, the narrator sags under the burden of his father's heroic reputation as a military agent who made a daring escape from the Gestapo. The son leads a wreck of a life, child-abusing, wife-hating, until his

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superior at a government office shows him documents purporting to prove that the father's heroism was all a fraud, that he cracked under German interrogation and merely invented the tales of grandeur. In Swift's world, this is what such parents deserve. In *Out of This World* (1988), the oppressing father, Robert Beech of Beech Munitions Company, war hero and decorated manufacturer of arms, a "life member of the valor club," is blown to bits by the IRA. And now, in *Ever After*, the father is doubly disabled—first identified as a cuckold driven to suicide and then unmasked as no father at all, as merely the convenient husband masking the traces of his wife's lover.

These relentless generational conflicts belong to a much larger history, a national history summoned in the new novel when the narrator mocks his father's ambitions to "sort out" the world. Sort it out for what? For "some old, dream-world restored, in which implacable British sergeant majors bawled forever over far-flung parade grounds and men followed well-trodden paths to glory and knighthood"? The Weak Son is modern England. This is the connection toward which the books are driven: that in their portraits of individual failure and powerlessness they are also sketching a nation's fate. "You wouldn't believe," writes Swift in *Out of This World*, that England was once "big, plump, and bossy," not this England that is now the infirm and wayward child, the flabby heir to the Father of Empire. The fall from imperial pomposity, from the culture of the Great Fathers: this is something that Swift accepts with scarcely a hiccup of nostalgia. But what has put him in such a tight box recently, and what has made his last two novels seem forced, and even frantic, is that he so fiercely attacks the old illusions without any idea of what might go in their place.

Toward the end of *Out of This World* the photographer son of the arms manufacturer comes to a piercing insight:

> used to believe that ours was the age in which we would say farewell to myths and legends, when they would fall off us like useless plumage and we would see ourselves clearly only as we are. I thought the camera was the key to this process. But I think the world cannot bear to be only what it is. The world always wants another world, a shadow, an echo, a model of itself.

I see this little piece of commentary as a perfect placing of Swift's own uneasy writing space. Part of the strength of *Waterland* was that Swift found a way to get past the crippling conflict between the real and the imaginary. In the fens of England, in the history of canals and breweries, flood and drainage, he found a borderland where reality and mythology were not clearly distinct, where history and story were not enemies but twins. How he achieved such a fusion, and why it has not returned, no one can say. The lighting upon an image that glows, the discovery of a rhythm that makes the pen dance, these are not things that you can will into being. Ever since *Waterland* Swift has spoken haltingly where once he sang.

His new book twists its protagonist into new contortions. Bill Unwin is a recently failed suicide, a widower, who finds himself in the academic easy-chair because his stepfather has made an irresistible offer to an unnamed British university: take my handsome endowment of a professorship with the condition that my stepson is its first holder. So, like many another Swiftian son, Unwin's life has been chosen for him, and like the others, comfort brings no ease. He is, and knows himself to be, a superfluous man: without family, without talent, without mission.

The twist that winds the plot, that links the superfluous man back to the world, is his discovery among his dead mother's papers of the notebooks of a Victorian ancestor, one Matthew Pearce. This is an academic bonanza for poor Unwin. The Pearce notebooks are the intimate record of a spiritual agony, the rich immediate testimony of the crisis of faith that usually comes to us as an abstract category in histories of the nineteenth century. In the summer of 1844, Matthew Pearce saw the fossil of an ichthyosaurus, and from the moment of that glimpse he began to live out the Victorian drama in which science erodes the security of faith.

Pearce marries a rector's daughter; the rector becomes a second father, another of Swift's dominating traditionalists; and when Pearce finally confesses that he believes no more, he suffers the fate of the spurned son. Losing the father's affection, he loses everything else besides: wife, children, home, work, nation. At every stage Pearce understands that the demand to know the truth is tearing him away from those he loves. And still he cannot control the knowledge lust. When his place in the family affections (and in his wife's bed) is usurped by a conventional replacement, Pearce departs for America, leaving behind those notebooks that ultimately find their way into Unwin's shaking hands.

This has been one of Swift's recurrent themes, that knowledge is an ambiguous virtue, that to make a fetish of full consciousness, consciousness at all costs, is simply to court another human disability. Unwin looks back on his late tormented Victorian progenitor whose refusal to accept illusions led him to tear his life to pieces, and in contrast he chooses blind love for his dead wife. After all the wreck of his life's mythologies, he lets himself love her fading image. If there's nothing else, at least there's that: Ever After.

Swift knows this to be a perilous conclusion, knows that in cynical times it looks mawkish and trite, and what gives an uncomfortable edginess to his recent fiction is that he writes as if he expects contradiction. He defends Love with clenched fists, ready to strike anyone who mocks or teases. It's clear from *Ever After* that he expects trouble on two flanks, and rather than wait for the charge to come, he strides belligerently forward.

On the first flank stand those academics into whose fetid ranks Unwin has fallen. In one of the story's main threads, Unwin finds himself challenged by a vain, ambitious, and pleasure-seeking professor named Potter. Potter wants the Pearce manuscripts for himself—"the spiritual crisis of the mid-nineteenth century is *my subject*"—because he wants to make his name among Victorianists by delivering this luscious scholarly find. He flatters, taunts, and berates Unwin, dangles his wife as sexual bait, all the while managing his own sordid affair with a graduate student. He is all head and loins with no beating heart between.

"It sounds terribly clichéd," Swift has recently said, "but one does write from the heart." The worry that a commitment to feeling, to the life of emotions, will be a cliché hangs over Swift's novel, and it arouses the heavy satire of those mockers of love, the academics. Professor Potter is a stick, a lifeless, loveless caricature. And yet it's not simply a personal crotchet that drives Swift to draw such a figure; it's a plausible recognition that academic values and the writing of fiction are at odds. Plato's ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry is now being played out between the professoriate, with its huge apparatus for generating critical discourse, and writers like Swift, who live outside academic walls but feel the encroachments of crit-speak. It is easy to see why Swift would feel embattled, but the antagonism helps no one. Swift's writing is awkwardly distended by the need to defend its emotions; some of the disappoint-

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ments in his work are clearly due to this need to *insist* on the heart.

On the second flank we stand, the Americans, who are no more gently treated in *Ever After*. After the suicide of Unwin's supposed father, his mother marries her lover, an American named Sam Ellison, heir to a plastics fortune, who after World War II extends his empire to Europe. It is Ellison the stepfather who forces Unwin on the university, and Ellison who incarnates all the swollen authority of the Swiftian father, bullying, lecherous, coarse, impossible. "You gotta accept it, pal ... the real stuff is running out, it's used up, it's blown away, or it costs too much. You gotta have *substitoots*"—this is the way that vulgar plastic Sam is made to speak in his "indelible Cleveland accent." He dies making love to a prostitute.

The usurping American stepfather dominates the weak English son. This is not only the latest version of the Swift family conflict; it belongs to this next, agitated phase in British-American cultural relations. The threat of American cultural empire is not a new worry, but recently it has become more barbed and stinging. Last year, in A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, the literary detective plot turned on the nefarious (and extravagantly well-funded) attempts of an American professor to appropriate English literary treasures to his own scholarly empire. The Mercedes-driving, checkbook-toting Professor Cropper is literally a grave robber, willing to open any coffin in order to seize a cultural relic. Indeed, the plot similarities between *Possession* and *Ever After* are striking—the contest over rediscovered Victorian manuscripts, the struggle against academic vultures, the caricatures of American venality—and they must have given Swift's publishers some serious pause. But what is for some an awkwardness of publishing can stand for others as the symptom of a persistent intercultural tension too sharp to ignore.

The sense that monied American enthusiasts stumble blindly among the subtleties of English culture, that a native new-world boorishness insists on arranging old-world lives, that our acquisitiveness will devour an island's ancient civilities—this is neither new nor adequate as a reading of our national character. Still, if it has become so marked in the past few years, there is a reason. A generation of English writers has now grown whose early personal memories are of an empire withdrawing to the island where it all began, who watch the steady triumph of American monoculture, of McDisney and friends, and cannot quite shake the sense that while they weave the fine old web of English literature, the barbarians are at the gates.

Swift's *Ever After*, like Byatt's *Possession*, goes in search of a haven for national identity, some place where a diminished Britain can protect its threatened virtues. When Bill Unwin is told that his biological father was not the square-chinned Colonel but a train engineer "on the main line west" whom his mother illicitly loved, then he is set free from unsustainable pretensions of grandeur, set free to be linked *through the blood* to an honest England, the England of Victorian doubter Matthew Pearce and that of his "nameless, engine-driving, killed-in-the-war father." In *Possession*, the romantic conclusion turns on the discovery that the young scholar fending off the rich American Cropper is improbably descended from the two Victorian poets she studies. In both Swift and Byatt, this holding fast to biological descent appears as a saving refuge. What the academics cannot ruin and the Americans cannot appropriate is precisely this blood connection, this history written into the genes, this national biology.

Swift's is anything but a vulgar nationalism, and yet the anxieties that trouble his fiction are the anxieties of a national identity grown acutely uncertain. Of course, Britain is not unique in this; but because its literary achievement still counts heavily for many of us, its trembles are worth recording. At the moment Swift is a trembly writer who has chosen to make weakness his muse. A recent interview closes with these words: "What else do you write from but the fact that you yourself are a vulnerable human being, full of your own faults and weaknesses?"

You might have expected this last phrase to perform the usual balancing of strength against weakness, but instead it heaps weaknesses on top of faults. And there you have Swift, committing himself to a literature based on loss, failure, decline, corrosion. His recent fiction stands as a record of the good life under siege, of England in decay, and much of its unpleasantness comes from his willingness to keep staring downward. But finally it won't do, it can't do, this division of the world into sensitive little chaps who know their faults and the burly others, the soldiers and the professors, who smash statues and twist noses.

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The God That Paled

BY ERNEST GELLNER

The Communists: The Story of Power and Lost Illusions 1948-91 by Adam B. Ulam

(Macmillan, 528 pp., $27.50)

From the viewpoint of a sincere Russian patriot (and such persons exist), the developments of the late 1980s and thereafter can only be characterized as disastrous. Before perestroika, Russia was, under the name of USSR, a great power, respected and feared, recognized as a co-sovereign of the world and an arbiter of the international order. Its support was sought by many of the weaker and poorer countries. Despite its blemishes, it continued to embody for many Western intellectuals a morally inspired rival model of how to run human society.

Its economic standard was low compared with the West, but it was good compared with the remembered past of most of the populations who were incorporated within it. It seemed to contain national strife almost effortlessly. It had defeated a notoriously efficient power in the greatest war ever fought, an enemy that had the industrial resources of the rest of the European continent at its disposal, not to mention the active support of a good number of continental regimes and a good proportion of its own population. The Soviet Union had transformed a nation of illiterate peasants into a nation of moderately well educated (and in any case literate) industrial workers, and turned itself into a superpower.

Less than a decade later, all of this is in ruins. The new foreign policy of the erstwhile superpower now consists

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largely of waving a begging bowl. The erstwhile larger unit has disintegrated into a set of smaller states, many of which seem about as precarious as were the successor states of the Habsburg empire, which collapsed so readily when Hitler and Stalin appeared on the scene. The far from brilliant economy of the Soviet Union—its services were appalling, but most of its citizens were tolerably housed and dressed and safe from hunger—has been replaced by a genuine economic crisis, near-penury, the threat of criminalization, and a cynical *Lumpenkapitalismus* unsanctified by any of the entrepreneurial virtues that at least sometimes graced earlier forms of free enterprise.

Was it worth it, and how did it happen? A decision to liberalize, taken from above, had achieved what the Wehrmacht's biggest and most ruthless campaign had failed to achieve, and with a relatively small cost in lives; the bloodletting that accompanied the process was frictional rather than inherent, the consequence of some commanders still trying to play by the old rules, or, more frequently, of conflict between rival heirs of the old system. What had caused it all? The failure to foresee the avalanche impact of accelerating liberalization, or the admirable lack of will to arrest it ruthlessly when that acceleration and its consequences became manifest; and in the end also the consequences of the accidental psychological chemistry of the relationship of two men.

Gorbachev controlled the central institution, Yeltsin the biggest of the republics. If, in alliance with other republics, Yeltsin could dismantle the central seat under Gorbachev, then Yeltsin would win, and he had no hesitation in using this method. In a way, he behaved like Lenin, who also had no hesitation about sacrificing the Ukraine and other border regions of the Russian empire, if this assured him control of the center. Later he could re-expand again, when conditions became favorable.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not, and never have been, a Marxist. I have felt nausea for the political incarnation of Marxism ever since I reached political consciousness in my early teens, under the influence of Koestler, Orwell, Popper, and later Aron. It gives me deep pleasure that one of the world's loveliest cities is no longer named after the *durak* whose unwavering faith in a set of mistaken beliefs, and whose organizational talent, turned him into the Ignatius Loyola of Marxism, forging the tool that made possible the establishment of one of the most repulsive regimes ever. All this can be taken as read. But now that the system has collapsed, so suddenly, unexpectedly, and completely (and thank God it has), it may be useful to imagine what it all looks like to those who care about the future of Russia, and also to ask just how and why it happened and whether it could have been managed better.

Adam Ulam's book constitutes a valuable text for anyone eager to grapple with such questions. His own basic answer concerning the cause of the collapse is offered already in the introduction: "Moscow's rule over other countries collapsed because of the complete bankruptcy of the ideology underlying the Soviet system itself." Ulam proceeds to endorse Keynes's view that in the end it is ideas that matter. If this is the crucial clue, though, it is somewhat odd that the book itself is primarily a political narrative rather than an ideological analysis.

But "bankruptcy," in this context, is a very ambiguous word. It is certainly the case that most of the propositions constituting the more or less coherent system known as Marxism are false. (Many are protected from falsification by being endowed with multiple meanings, some trivial, which serve as a kind of fallback position.) But since when has the falsity of its belief system made a society unviable? It is not the falsity of the system as a whole that matters so much as the economic consequences of its central intuitions about the proper organization of production.

An industrial society must be politically centralized; it cannot delegate the maintenance of social order to local groupings (as other complex societies can and do), because this would be incompatible with the advanced form of the division of labor, and with occupational and other mobility. In the case of the Soviet Union, economic centralization was added to this, in the name of social rather than selfish control of resources, and so was ideological centralization, in the name of a self-righteous messianism that saw the whole process as the final fulfillment of human potentials and social morality. The result was a single hierarchical pyramid: a society in which power was virtually the only real form of wealth, and where only power led to power.

This concentration of all stakes in one single game, and the moralistic idiom in which its outcome had to be articulated, given the absolutistic messianism inherent in Marxism (losers must be sinners, they may not be innocent), led to a ruthlessness and a politicization of all internal competition. This was not only disastrous humanly (though it wouldn't necessarily bring down a society, any more than the falsity of beliefs would), but also economically. The economy was relatively (though not absolutely) catastrophic. The Counter-Reformation could more or less insulate the peasant societies that it doomed to backwardness and survive for centuries. It turned out that the Bolsheviks could not emulate the Jesuits and similarly insulate an industrial society—though for a time they tried, and partly succeeded.

Communism has often and plausibly been compared to a religion. Religions, however, have a tenacious hold over the hearts of many of their believers, much to the despair of rationalists. The recent developments in the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe suggest that Marxism is an eminently curable faith, as faiths go. Why was the world's first social religion articulated in formally naturalistic terms so incapable of emulating the psychic appeal of its transcendental predecessors? Why have its roots proved so shallow?

My own hunch is that its weakness lies in its pantheistic attempt to sacralize the whole of social life, including (above all) the economy. The deification of this world constituted a crucial weakness of Marxism as a faith. In a sense, it is Spinoza, Marx's ancestor through Hegel, who is really at fault. It is often said that societies need religion, but they also need profanity, and this sacralization of everything leaves men no bolthole into which to escape when faith temporarily loses its ardor. The Soviets could not be told *enrichissez-vous* while waiting for the next bout of world-saving enthusiasm: the economy was already pre-empted as a sacrament of that aspiration. It was the squalor, more than the terror, that really eroded the faith.

Industrial societies live under the rule of two sovereign masters: the imperative of economic growth and the satisfaction of the nationalist principle. Marxism promised a secret shortcut to the satisfaction of the former; and when this promise failed, the distinctively—and attractively—Russian way of attempting to correct this, by liberalizing politically, in the naive expectation that this would fairly soon lead to greater prosperity, destroyed the Russian path-from-socialism. It did so largely by releasing the nationalist forces that had previously been contained. Ulam's book tells the story and tells it well. It is not unduly rich or daring in interpretations, but it helps us to work out our own.

ERNEST GELLNER is the author most recently of *Reason and Culture* (Blackwell).

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Sacred cow

THE ONE REDEEMING PART OF Ross Perot's candidacy is his wife. Margot Perot has no intention of campaigning for her husband and could not imagine ever sitting in on a Cabinet meeting. This is not because she has no opinions: a former schoolteacher, Mrs. Perot clearly has a mind of her own. She simply intends to keep a respectful distance from the professional life of her husband by maintaining a silence on matters political. Such is her respect for the workings of democracy. Perot, for his part, has so far shown an admirable desire to keep his marriage out of the public eye, although, of course, he shows an unhealthy obsession with the details of everybody else's. The Perots are old-fashioned in all this; but it's the kind of old-fashionedness that, as with much else in Perot's candidacy, has its own somewhat cranky integrity. And it is this integrity, I think, that has a great deal to do with their appeal.

COMPARE HILLARY CLINTON. THE reason so many people find her unappealing is not out of some sexist resentment that she is a smart and articulate woman; or even that she has a veiled contempt for women who choose the life of the home over the life of the office and the home. It is that she seriously seems to think that anyone would be interested in what she has to say because she is married to a candidate for president. We're not. In democracies, citizens are properly interested in the views of people who run for office, not the views of their spouses. Of course, Hillary's close relationship with a possible president means that there will always be some curiosity about this private-public influence. But what's at issue is how it affects Bill's views of the world. Mrs. Clinton's own interests—*pace* Garry Wills—are irrelevant. What she does have to say—as was evident in her Wellesley speech and in her own sporadic writings—is completely unexceptional for the run-of-the-mill liberal activist. On her own, she'd never be elected president of the United States, and her attempt to get there by virtue of her marriage is not only an insult to all the women candidates who have the temerity actually to run for office but a worrying sign of a creeping Clinton court. Why, then, doesn't she simply keep quiet? Better still, why not stay away from all political events with her husband and only be seen at social gatherings or public occasions directly connected with her own career? Let Denis Thatcher be her role model and her husband would stand a far greater chance of getting elected.

BUT THE MOST EGREGIOUS OFfender in the First Lady stakes is the First Lady herself. Mrs. Bush has achieved the extraordinary feat of being perhaps the most political of recent First Ladies and the least criticized. In Washington it's virtually treason to say anything even vaguely critical of her. Some of this good karma is deserved. Mrs. Bush looks great on TV, has a good line in high-WASP self-deprecation, and seems the picture of mental alertness when seated next to her increasingly addled husband. She helped get Sununu fired and tried to persuade her husband not to seek a second term. But what worries me about Bar is that her increasingly open campaigning for George is not allied with any thorough scrutiny from the press.

BARBARA PLAYS THE HILLARY game, but far more cleverly. She pounds the hustings, stomping for her husband while he remains in the White House; she helps raise money for him and provides a critical layer of good p.r. that helps insulate him from the political criticism his presidency deserves. She is, in many respects, his teflon. Her main power—access—is deployed with all the skill Nancy so pitifully lacked. Washington journalists constantly tell stories of Barbara's monitoring of reporters, keeping hostile ones out of the loop, treating others, as one once put it to me, "like the help," and generally using her clout not only to ensure glowing coverage of herself, but also of her husband's administration. One of the reasons you've never read a hostile story about her by a White House reporter is not that such a story could not exist but that the reporter would never be given any meaningful access to the administration again. Any conventional Cabinet member who played the press this way, apart from the masterful James Baker, would have his comeuppance. Barbara is immune.

HER POLITICAL SKILLS ARE MORE diverse still. To be sure, First Ladies have always had some political say in the politics of any administration. But Barbara has taken this to new depths. By making noises on abortion, she helps soften Bush's pro-life position in the eyes of the voters; in her humanitarian work, which George regularly cites in his speeches, she exudes an appearance of domestic involvement on the part of the administration that helps defuse public discontent. In all these things, she may be commended or criticized. But if she is to play politics in this way, the least that should be asked in return is that the press be entitled to ask her questions about the administration's policies in general. Given her work on literacy, what are her views on funding Head Start? Given her record of compassion for people with AIDS, what does she think of the Reagan-Bush record in the matter? Given her independent campaigning for Bush in the primaries, how would she address the problems of the economy? She will, of course, refuse to answer these questions; and, unlike Hillary, she will get away with it. But she will get away with it not because she is somehow more dignified or more principled or nicer than Mrs. Clinton, but because she is more shameless.

THE KEY TO BARBARA'S SUCcess in this regard has a great deal to do with class. One of the reasons many reporters refuse to tackle Barbara the way they lacerated Nancy is that they cringe in the presence of real American class. Barbara may spend a fortune renovating the White House, but because it is done with the requisite aristocratic touches, it's fine. Barbara may "write" a simpering book about her dog, but she is not criticized for its self-regarding pomposity because it's the kind of thing the queen of England might write about her corgis. Barbara's mastery of frumpy do-goodery is, of course, modeled artfully on the Windsors. But the Windsors are allowed this pretense because they have no power, support no administration, espouse no real politics. And they have to endure the kind of personal scrutiny from which Barbara is invariably excused. Mrs. Bush now has it every which way: she's the American queen mother, protected from private scrutiny, and the master politician, who is never questioned on public policy. George Bush began his State of the Union address this year by remarking that it would be far more successful if Barbara gave it herself. The line was drowned out by thunderous applause from Republicans and Democrats alike. And it is, of course, patently untrue. Barbara's usefulness is in her discretion: a visual code word for the aristocratic corruption of contemporary Washington; a stealth-Nancy in Keds.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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Schmidt Jumps to Whittle

BY ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

There was a lot of hoopla a few weeks ago when the president of Yale University resigned and took a new job. This is not front page news in itself, but Benno Schmidt was leaving a prestigious job to become CEO of a national chain of private, for-profit schools being planned by entrepreneur Christopher Whittle. Whittle, best known for Channel One, which provides schools with television sets and satellite dishes in return for a guarantee that their students will watch a daily 12-minute news program with 2 minutes of commercials, says he aims to turn around American education with his Whittle schools.

If Benno Schmidt were a businessman, there would be nothing surprising in this move. The chain of schools he will lead is likely to be a tremendous money maker: Whittle has talked about revenues of more than $10 billion a year by 2010. And the Edison Project, as Whittle calls it, could get a big financial boost if states pass voucher initiatives like the one pending in California, which would allow the spending of taxpayer money to pay for private school tuition.

But Schmidt is not a businessman—he's a scholar and a former Ivy League president. So what has attracted him to the Edison Project? If he wanted to devote his energies to American K-12 education, couldn't he find a better way than joining a chain of private, for-profit schools?

The important point about the Edison Project, according to Schmidt, is that it will offer K-12 education a new start. Edison Project thinkers, he says, will consider new uses of technology in the schools; they will look at the possibility of keeping students in school more hours in a day and more days in a year; they will think about different ways to use teachers and volunteers. They will, as a Whittle ad that appeared in the *New York Times* put it, give "America's schools...fundamental structural change [instead of] tinkering around the edges."

The question remains: "Has Chris Whittle gained credibility or has Benno Schmidt lost it?"

Of course these ideas are worthwhile, but nothing about them is revolutionary. They've all been around for some time, and nobody has been able to make them work. So why should we assume that the appearance of the Edison Project has made realizing them a certainty? It's as though the medical profession suddenly announced that they would have a cure for cancer or AIDS or the common cold within two or three years. Of course no one would make an announcement like this in any field but education. It's only in education that people can get up, promise the moon—without much prospect of delivering it—and get lots of applause.

Some people consider the Whittle schools a threat to public education because they worry about what will happen when a number of families who can afford to pay $5000 tuition per year pull their kids out of public school. But turning an educational venture into a for-profit business poses the bigger threat of what we might call an educational-industrial complex. At present, the major reason companies care about schools is because they want well-trained employees. But when schools *become* a business—and a potentially enormous business at that— the situation changes. There will be a number of big companies with a financial stake in Whittle's schools. Of course they will want to ensure the success of the Edison Project. And what better way to do that than to lobby the government to pass voucher legislation? As a result, what should be an educational and social issue only will become a business matter as well.

Whether or not they succeed financially, Whittle schools will face the same problems as other American schools, both public and private, in improving student performance. American students do not do much work in high school because they don't need to work to get what they want. The exception is students who hope to be admitted to elite colleges—and they work very hard indeed. Otherwise, our students know that they will be able to find a college to admit them as long as they have a high school diploma and enough money. The same goes for students who are going right from a school to a job. They know that employers don't care what courses they have taken or how well they have done as long as they have a diploma. Our lack of student incentives makes it difficult to persuade most students in public and private schools to do much work. Adding a private, for-profit chain to the mix will not change that.

Benno Schmidt is right when he says that there is nothing more important for our society than reforming our schools. But it's amazing that he has decided this is possible in the private, for-profit sector and only there. If he had really been interested in helping public education, he might have looked at education systems in other countries.

He would not have found any successful private, for-profit chains of schools. But he would have found plenty of successful public education systems—in France, Germany, Japan and Canada, to name a few. And he might have devoted his energy and intellect to trying to figure out how to make our public schools run as effectively as schools in those countries and our students achieve at the same high levels. This would have been a challenging task. As everyone knows, you cannot simply transpose a system of governance or a set of standards from one country's school system into another's. But Benno Schmidt is a smart and energetic man, and I'm sure his help would have been invaluable.

As it is, the question remains whether Schmidt's hopping on board the Whittle enterprise means that Chris Whittle has gained credibility or that Benno Schmidt has lost it.

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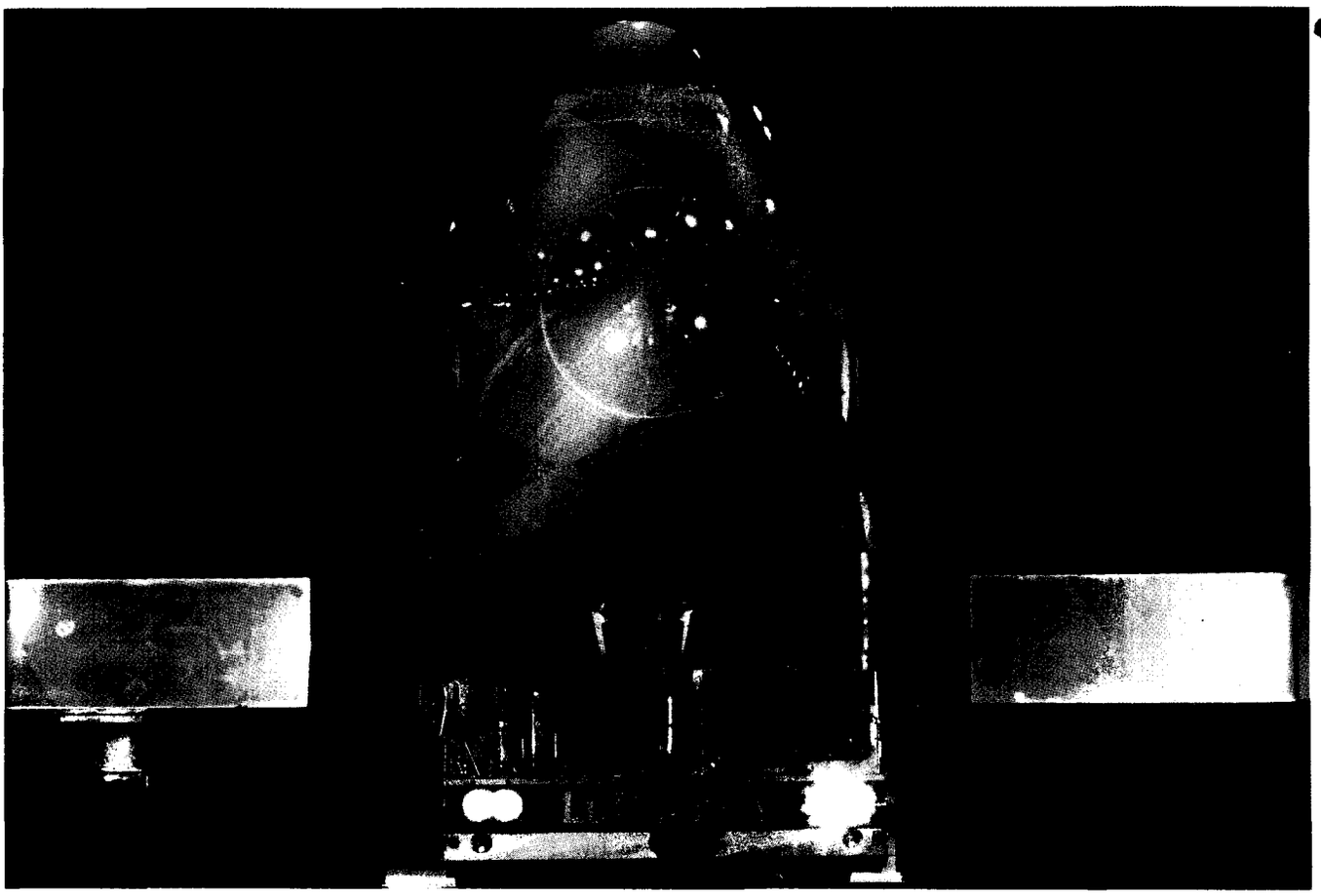

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